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THE LADY'S MILE

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THE LADY'S MILE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

75423

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

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TO

SIR EDWIN LANDSEER, R.A. D.C.L.

ETC. ETC. ETC.

This Story is dedicated

AS AN

HUMBLE TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION

TO

HIS GREAT GENIUS

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THE LADY'S MILE.

CHAPTER I.

"HE IS BUT A LANDSCAPE-PAINTER."

It was high tide—spring tide, if you will—at half-past six o'clock on a warm June evening: not the commonplace ebb and flow of a vulgar river; but the mighty tide of fashion's wonderful sea, surging westward, under the dusty elms and lindens of the Lady's Mile. If you had driven round this very park between four and five on this very afternoon, you would have been gratified by the sight of some half-dozen nursemaids with their straggling charges, an occasional girl and perambulator, a picturesque life-guardsman here and there, making a little spot of crimson amongst the wavering

shadows of the trees, a few hulking idlers in corduroy and bluchers, and a tipsy female sleeping on the grass. Now the excited policemen have enough to do to keep the four ranks of carriages in line, and to rescue foot-passengers from the pawing hoofs of three-hundred-guinea steeds. The walk under the trees is as crowded as the enclosure at Ascot, and the iron chairs are as fully occupied as the seats in a fashionable chapel. The pouncing proprietor, with the leathern pouch at his side, has hard work to collect his rents, so rapidly do his customers come and go, and is distracted by vague fears of levanting tenants and bad debts. On all the length of the rails between Hyde-Park Corner and the Serpentine there is scarcely room for one lounger more, for the rule of fashion is so subtile a bondage, that it has compelled millions of people who never in all their lives have spoken to one another to wear the same order of garments, and talk the same slang, and ride in the same kind of carriages, and eat the same class of dinners, and congregate in the same places, at the same hour, year after year,

and century after century, from the earliest dawn of civilisation until to-day.

The uninitiated lawyer's-clerk from Holloway, lounging in the same attitude, and wearing the same pearl-gray gloves, and the same pattern of whisker as the initiated young patrician from the crack West-end clubs, may wonder whether the occupants of the splendid equipages rolling slowly by him are there by right divine of noble birth and lofty position, or by virtue of that golden 'open sesame,' that wonderful *passe partout*, which success bestows so often on the struggling plebeian. The Uninitiated from Holloway sees that there is not so much interchange of becks and nods, or friendly greetings, as might be expected if those elegant barouches and useful laudaus, those dashing mail-phaetons and dainty little broughams, belonged only to the privileged classes whose highest privilege is the honour of being known to one another. Perceiving this, the Uninitiated perceives also, with astonished aspect, certain inhabitants of the Eastern Hemisphere, known to himself in their form of money-

grub, but transformed here into butterflies of fashion, and driving mail-phaetons. Advertising agents, money-lending lawyers, professional betting-men, dashing brewers, popular distillers, pass before him side by side with dukes and duchesses, and only to be distinguished therefrom by an impalpable something which has no name. The Uninitiated, growing melancholy, begins to think that it is a hard thing not to have high-stepping horses and a mail-phaeton, and turns sadly from so much splendour to wend his way northwards, while high-born elbows close in upon the half-yard of railing which he leaves vacant. There are few places more calculated to inspire discontent than this Lady's Mile. Pale Envy stalks to and fro under the sheltering trees; Greed of Gain lurks invisible behind the iron chairs; Disappointed Ambition waits at the corner, ready to whisper in the poor man's ear, "Time was when you thought it such an easy thing to win a place amongst those favourites of fortune. Time was when you thought to see your wife sitting behind high-stepping horses, and your boy trotting his

pony in the Row. Go home, poor drudge, with your blue-bag on your shoulder, and look at the slatternly drab leaning over the washtub, and the shabby whelp gambling for marbles in the gutter. Compare the picture of the present with the vision you once made for yourself of the future; and then be an agreeable husband and an indulgent father, and enjoy your domestic happiness and your penny newspaper, if you can."

We are a wealthy nation, the political economist tells the poor man, and our superfluous wealth must find employment somehow or other. Hence the crush of high-stepping horses, the crowd of three-hundred-guinea barouches, the flutter of costly garments rustling in the summer air, the glitter and splendour which pervades every object, until it seems almost as if the superfluous gold were melted into the atmosphere, and all the female population were so many Miss Kilmanseggs. The lounger on the rails may for the moment find it almost difficult to believe that hungry women and gaunt hag-

gard-looking men can have any place in the world of which this dazzling region is a part: but he need only look backward, under the shadow of the trees, to see poverty and crime prowling side by side in their rags. Yet at the worst, the dazzle and the glitter are good for trade; and it is better that the tide of wealth should be rolling to and fro along the Lady's Mile than locked in a miser's coffers or given in alms to professional beggars at a church-door. Some part of the superfluous gold must pass through the horny hands of labour before it can be transmuted into C-springs or patent-axles, Honiton lace or Spitalfields silk; and perhaps the safest of all philosophy is that which accepts the doctrine that "whatever is, is right."

But amongst the loungers on the rails this summer evening there was one person stationed with his companion some little distance from the rest of the idlers, who was very much inclined to quarrel with this easy-going axiom, or with any other sentiment that involved contentment. The eyes with which Philip Foley contemplated

the world were young, and rather handsome eyes; but they saw every thing in a jaundiced light just now. He was a painter, self-contained and ambitious as a disciple of art should be. But he had not yet learnt the sublime patience of the faithful disciple; and he was angry with Fortune because she hid her face; forgetful that if she is a churlish mother, she can also be an over-indulgent one, and sometimes destroys her fairest favourites by smiling upon them too soon. Philip Foley was in love, and the girl he loved was the most capricious little enchantress who ever studied the prettiest method of breaking her adorers' hearts. The summer light which should have shone upon the back of his shabby painting-jacket, as he stood before his easel, dazzled his eyes as he looked along the Lady's Mile, seeking her carriage among the crowd.

"I say, Foley, old fellow, when are you coming out of this, eh?" demanded Sigismund Smythe, the novelist, who had abandoned the penny public to court the favour of circulating-library subscribers, and had sublimated the vulgar

Smith into the aristocratic Smythe. Mr. Smythe the author and Mr. Foley the painter were sworn friends; and the placid Sigismund was recreating himself after a day's hard labour on the "Testimony," of his latest hero, "Written in the Hulks."

"Out of which?"

"The reflective line. You haven't spoken for the last quarter of an hour. That's a pretty girl with the strawberry-ice coloured parasol. I say though, old fellow, you don't suppose I've written two dozen three-volume novels without knowing something of the human mind when contemplated in relation to the tender passion. I know all about it, you know; and it's not the least use your abandoning yourself to melancholy meditation on *that* subject. She's all your fancy painted her, &c. &c., I allow; but she's the coldest-hearted and most mercenary little scoundrel in creation, and she never can be yours. Put a clean sponge over the tablet of your brain, dear boy, and turn your attention to somebody else."

"What new imbecility has afflicted your feeble intellect?" asked the painter indignantly. "I don't know what you're talking of."

"O yes you do, dear boy, and it's the same thing that you are thinking of, and its name amongst the vulgar is Florence Crawford; but it is better known in polite society as 'Flo.'"

The young painter gave a sardonic laugh.

"I should be a fool to trouble my head about *her*," he said contemptuously.

"So you would be a fool, old fellow; and so you are a fool, for you do trouble yourself about her. You've been on the watch for her carriage for the last half-hour, and she has not gone by; for instead of tormenting creation at large by driving here, I daresay she is torturing mankind in particular by stopping at home. Don't be an idiot, Phil, but come to Greenwich and have some dinner."

"No," cried Philip, "I will stop here till she passes me by, with her insolent little affectation of not seeing me, and all the pretty tricks that constitute her fascination. You think me a

fool, Sigismund; but you can never think so poorly of me as I think of myself, when I find myself here day after day, while the very light I want is shining into my wretched painting-room at Highbury. Do you remember what Catullus says?

'Odi et amo; quare id faciam, fortasse requiris:
Nescio, sed fieri sentio, et excrucior.'

Do you know that it is quite possible to love and hate the same person at the same moment? I love Florence Crawford because she is Florence Crawford. I hate her for the fatal bondage in which she holds me. I hate her for her evil influence upon my career. I hate her as the slave hates his master. Do other men suffer as I do, I wonder? or has feeling gone out of fashion, and am I behind the time? The most devoted lover nowadays only calls his betrothed a 'nice little party,' and hopes the 'governor will do the right thing.' The men whom I meet take pains to advertise their contempt for any thing like real feeling; and girls of eighteen tell you with a smile that a love-match is the most

preposterous thing in creation. The women of the present day are as heartless as they are beautiful; as artificial as they are charming,—the Dead-Sea fruit of civilisation, the—"

"The natural growth of the age of sixty-mile-an-hour locomotives," rejoined the placid Sigismund. "Do you forget that man is an imitative animal, and that the rate at which we travel has become the rate at which we live? Steam is the ruling principle of our age, and the pervading influence of our lives. Depend upon it, that ever since mankind began to exist, every succeeding age has lived faster than its predecessor. 'Time *was* that when the brains were out the man would die,' says Macbeth; 'but *now*,' &c. &c. He isn't a bit surprised at Banquo's appearance, you see. A ghost more or less is nothing extraordinary in a fast-going age. And we've been accelerating the pace ever since Macbeth's day. It used to take a man a week to go from London to Lyme Regis, and the best part of a lifetime to earn the few thousands which in his simple notions constituted a fortune. Now-

adays a man goes from London to New York in less than a fortnight; and he expects to make his half-million or so while the purple bloom is on his locks, and the light of youth in his eyes. Steam is every where and in every thing. We educate our children by steam; and our men and women want to grow rich at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Every man has the same tastes, the same aspirations. There is no such person nowadays as the Sir Balaam who thought it a grand thing to have two puddings for his Sunday dinner. Sir Visto is not the exception, but the rule; and the poor man ruins himself by blindly following the rich. Sir Balaam has a man cook, and dines *à la Russe*. Sir Balaam's cashier has his dinners from the confectioner, and dines *à la Russe* too. Sir Visto, the Manchester cotton-spinner, is a patron of the arts, and buys largely at Christie's. His clerks follow in his wake, and cover the walls of their little suburban dining-rooms with impossible Cuyps and sham Bakhuysens, bought in Wardour Street. Before we die we may see Sir Balaam and Sir Visto in the

Gazette, with all their followers at their heels. Look at the dresses and carriages passing by us. I know most of the people, more or less; and I can see the wives and daughters of hard-working professional men vying with the peerage and the autocracy of the money-market. Don't rail against the women, my dear Philip; the women are—what the men make them. You must have *Lui* before you can have *Elle*. Aspasia is impossible without Pericles. You could never have had a Cleopatra unless you had first your Cæsar; or your Marian de Lorme without Cinq Mars. The lives of the women of the present day are like this drive which they call the Lady's Mile. They go as far as they can, and then go back again. See how mechanically the horses wheel when they reach the prescribed turning-point. If they went any farther, I suppose they would be lost in some impenetrable forest depth in Kensington Gardens. In the drive the rule has no exception; because, you see, the barrier that divides the park from the gardens is a palpable iron railing, which the

stoutest hunter might refuse. But on the highway of life the boundary-line is not so clearly defined. There are women who lose themselves in some unknown region beyond the Lady's Mile, and whom we never hear of more. Ah, friend Philip, let us pity those benighted wanderers whose dismal stories are to be found amongst the chronicles of the Divorce Court, whose tarnished names are only whispered by scandal-loving dowagers between the acts of an opera, or in the pauses of a rubber. On this side, the barrier they pass seems so slight a one—a hedge of thorns that are half hidden by the gaudy tropical flowers that hang about them—a few scratches, and the boundary is passed; but when the desperate wanderer pauses for a moment on the other side to look backward, behold! the thorny hedgerow is transformed into a wall of brass that rises to the very skies, and shuts out earth and heaven."

It was not often that Mr. Smythe indulged in any such rhapsody as this in ordinary society; but Philip Foley and the novelist were sworn

friends and brothers, united by that pleasant bondage of sympathy which is a better brotherhood than the commoner bond of kindred. Sigismund had brothers and sisters in Midlandshire, but there was not one of them who could be as much to him as Philip the painter.

It is doubtful whether Mr. Foley had heard much of his friend's oration. He had been leaning on the rails in a moody attitude, watching the carriages go by. And now, when he spoke, it seemed as if he were replying to some question that had been brooding in his own mind, rather than to the observations of his friend.

"Do you think I don't know Florence Crawford?" he said, "and know that she is no wife for me—if she would have me—and she would as soon think of marrying me as the carver and gilder who makes her father's frames. Indeed, I daresay she'd rather marry the frame-maker, for he earns more money than I do, and could give her finer dresses. She has told me a hundred times that she will marry for money; that when she leaves her father's house—a bride, with in-

nocent bridal-flowers upon her brow—she will bid farewell to her home on the same principle as that on which her housemaid leaves her—to better herself. Think of her in my carpetless painting-room at Highbury, looking up from her work to watch me at my easel, and beguiling me with hopeful speeches when I am depressed. One reads of that sort of wife in a novel. But can you find me such an one nowadays, Sigismund? The women of the present day live only to look beautiful and to be admired. They are pitiless goddesses, at whose shrines men sacrifice the best gifts of their souls. When I look at the splendour of these carriages, the glory of the butterfly creatures who ride in them, I think how many plodding wretches are toiling in Temple-chambers, or lecturing in the theatres of hospitals, or pacing to and fro on the dusty floor of the Stock Exchange, racked by the thought of hazardous time-bargains, in order that these frivolous divinities may have gorgeous raiment and high-stepping horses, and plant the arrows of envious rage in one another's tender

bosoms. I think they learn the love of splendour in their cradles. They are proud of their lace-frocks and gaudy sashes before they can speak: their dolls are duchesses; or, what is worse, as Hippolyte Rigault has said, '*poupées aux camélias.*' And then they grow up, and some fine day a poor man falls in love with one of them, and finds that it would have been infinitely wiser to have dashed out his brains against a stone wall than to have been beguiled by the mad hope that a penniless lover's devotion could have any value in their sight."

"Wait till you have made a name, Phil, and can afford as grand a place as the Fountains, and then see if Miss Crawford won't be civil to you. Come, we may as well slope, old fellow; it's nearly seven o'clock. The enchantress will not appear to-night. Let us go somewhere and dine, and forget her."

"Dine by yourself, sybarite," answered the painter. "A man whose most laborious picture sells for a ten-pound note has no right to whitebait and Moselle. I can buy half a pound of damp

beef at the cook-shop as I go home. It will not be the first time that the silk-lining of my coat has been greased by a parcel from the cook-shop. I daresay I smell of beef sometimes when I call upon Florence Crawford."

"But, Phil, when you know I'm so glad to stand Sam—" remonstrated Mr. Smythe.

But he remonstrated in vain. Philip Foley rejoiced in his poverty and his deprivations as a gladiator might rejoice in the training that he knew must insure victory. To suffer and be strong was the young painter's motto, and he took a boyish pride in his bare rooms and his scanty dinners, the feat of pedestrianism that saved him a half-crown in cab-hire, the heroism which enabled him to carry his head loftily under a hat whose bloom had vanished. He was very young. His faults were the faults of youth—his graces the graces that perish with youth. He had all the insolent confidence in his own judgment and the contempt for other people which seems the peculiar attribute of five-and-twenty. He would point you out the feeble drawing in a fresco by

Michael Angelo, or the false lights in a Rembrandt, with an utter unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself. Hot-headed, generous-hearted, impulsive, undisciplined, candid, and true, Philip Foley was the incarnation of ambitious youth before the fiery steel has been thrice refined in the furnace of disappointment. He had only just begun the great battle, and as yet he saw in failure the evidence of the popular error, and not of his own weakness. The vision of his own future shone before him—only a little distant, and with no hindering clouds between. He was ready to paraphrase Cæsar's despatch, and cry aloud to all the world, "I am coming, I shall see, I shall conquer!"

The painter did not turn his head to bid his friend Sigismund adieu; he was looking along the line of carriages for that one equipage, to behold which was so thrilling a pleasure that it was worth his while to waste half a day for the chance of obtaining it.

The fairy chariot came by at last, with the fairy in it, and all the mortal coaches melted into

air. The fairy was a pretty, coquettish-looking girl, who seemed scarcely eighteen years of age, and whose dark-gray eyes and black eyelashes were rendered doubly enchanting by the piquancy of their contrast with her rippling golden hair. The fair one with the golden locks has become quite a common young person in these days of cunning hair-washes and Circassian waters; but Florence Crawford's waving tresses had been tinted only by the hand of Nature, and she was by no means proud of their sunny hue. She would have preferred to be a heavy-browed person of the masculine order, with blue-black hair and an aquiline nose, instead of that dear little insolent *retroussé*, which seemed perpetually asking questions of all humanity.

Yes; Miss Crawford's nose was decidedly *retroussé;* but it as little resembled the vulgar snub, or the lumpy pug, or the uncompromising turn-up, as a pearl resembles a lump of chalk.

It was the dearest and most delicate little nose that ever inhaled the odours of a costly bouquet in a box on the grand tier, or buried itself between

the flossy ears of a Maltese terrier. It was an aristocratic nose, and could be as imperiously disdainful as the stateliest Roman; but whatever it was, its delicate outline was engraved on Philip Foley's heart too deeply for his worldly welfare or his bosom's peace. She was as far away from him as the young June moon that glimmered pale in the daylight above the Lady's Mile. And yet she was only a painter's daughter; but then there was all the distance that divides the topmost pinnacle of Fame's mighty mountain from the lowest depths of obscurity between William Crawford, R.A., of the Fountains, Kensington, and Philip Foley, of Adelgisa Crescent, Highbury.

That he was clever, every body who knew any thing about the art he loved was ready to acknowledge; that he had something in him that was of a grander and sterner stuff than cleverness, Philip Foley himself knew very well. If he had been only clever, success would have been a much easier thing for him; and he knew this too.

Owen Meredith has very nobly said that "genius does what it must, and talent does what

it can." And Philip Foley obeyed the ungovernable impulse within him, and flung gloom, and darkness, and meteoric skies, and raging seas, and all manner of Titanic grandeur upon his canvases, when he should have been painting inevitable rustic maidens in scarlet cloaks, trotting meekly across the wooden bridges that span placid mill-streams, or fishermen's white-sailed craft bobbing up and down upon bright blue-and-opal seas. If it had not been for the patronage of two or three north-country magnates, whose boyhood had been spent on the bleak shores of the German Ocean, and who bought Philip's rugged cliffs and darksome seas for love of their own vanished youth, the young painter would have found life's battle a sore and difficult fight; but with a little income of his own, the grace of these rich patrons, and the help of considerable employment from Mr. Crawford, for whom he sometimes painted backgrounds, Philip Foley was rich enough to have leisure to declaim about his poverty,—and your real poverty has no time for declamation. He was rich enough to live without care, to entertain his friends with

unlimited bitter-beer from the nearest tavern, and to keep an unfailing supply of mild tobacco in the French china jar that adorned his mantelpiece. He could afford to dress like a gentleman, and to waste a good deal of his life in haunting the places where Florence Crawford was likely to be met; and, good year or bad year, he never failed to carry a rich silk dress, or a handsome shawl, or a wonderfully-inlaid casket, or workbox, or portfolio, or tea-caddy, to a maiden lady in a sleepy little village deep down in a pastoral valley some ten or twelve miles from Burkesfield, Bucks,—a valley that lay out of the track of coach-road or railway, and had made no more progress within the last forty years than if the inhabitants had been so many Rip Van Winkles.

The maiden lady was Philip Foley's aunt, and the only near relation he possessed. That she loved him to distraction was the most natural thing in the world, for she was a gentle and loving creature, and for the last five-and-twenty years of her life had concentrated her affection upon the orphan boy who had come from India a frail nurs-

ling to be committed to her charge by his sickly father, who went back to Bengal to die, within the year of his return, on a dismal march through a cholera-haunted district. Whence the child derived his love of art, no one knew. His father had been an ensign in the Company's service; his mother, a frivolous young person, with thirteen hundred pounds in Indian Stock, a tendency to consumption, and not two ideas of her own. But the divine afflatus that gives life to the nostrils of painters and poets is no hereditary possession to be handed from father to son, like so many acres of common earth, or so much money in consols. From the hour in which Philip Foley's baby fingers first tightened round a pencil, he was an artist. He drew houses, and apple-trees, and straggling reptiles which he meant for horses, before he could speak; and then when he was old enough to buy his first colour-box, he went out into the woods and fields, like Constable; and alone, amongst the beautiful mysteries of nature, his soul and mind expanded, unfettered and untaught.

The time came, as it almost always does come, sooner or later, in the lives of gifted creatures, when the appreciative stranger came across the boy's pathway. An elderly gentleman came suddenly upon young Philip one day, as he sat on a fallen tree in a clearing, painting the glade that stretched before him, darkly mysterious in its sombre shadows. The elderly gentleman asked the boy more questions than he had ever been asked consecutively in his life before; and as it generally happens to a lad who is tolerably well connected, it happened in this case. The elderly gentleman had known a member of Philip's family, and was inclined to be interested in him on that account.

"But a great deal more so on account of those purple shadows," said the stranger pleasantly. "One may meet young sprigs of old families any day in the year; but a lad of fourteen who has such nice ideas about light and shade is by no means a common person. And your aunt is using all her interest to get you to Addiscombe, is she? so that you may follow in your father's footsteps, and die of cholera at sunrise, to be buried in the

sands before sunset. Let your aunt use her interest to get you into Mr. O'Skuro's academy, and she'll be employing it for some purpose. Your mother had some money, hadn't she?"

"Fifty pounds a year," answered the boy blushing. He had all the grand notions which are common to extreme youth, and was almost ashamed to proclaim the pitiful amount.

"And very nice too," returned the stranger briskly; "I have known men whom fifty pounds a-year—yes, or five-and-twenty—would have saved from ruin,—clever men who have starved for want of ten shillings a-week. A man with a pound a-week, secured to him for his lifetime, need never commit a dishonourable action, or accept an insult. Take me to see your aunt, Mr. Foley; and if I find her a sensible woman, we'll have you sitting behind your drawing-board at O'Skuro's academy before the year is out."

The elderly gentleman was as good as his word. He turned out to be an amateur landscape-painter, who united untiring industry to the smallest amount of ability, and who, with a very

limited income, had contrived to collect a wonderful little gallery of what he called "bits," broker's-shop and obscure sale-room acquisitions, which adorned the walls of a tiny cottage at Dulwich, and which he was wont to exhibit every Sunday to admiring friends or sceptical connoisseurs.

Before the year was out Miss Foley had consented to a bitter sacrifice, the sacrifice which she knew must come sooner or later, and had packed her boy's trunks, and stood on the platform at Burkesfield to watch the departure of the train that carried him away from her.

Mr. Theophilus Gee, the amateur and connoisseur, had talked her into the belief that her nephew was an embryo Turner; and she had bidden the boy go forth upon the first stage on the great highway that leads to glory, or to disappointment and death. He left the simple elegance of his aunt's cottage, and the tutorship of the Burkesfield curate, to plunge into the universal Bohemia of art; and for four years he worked conscientiously under the fostering care of Mr. O'Skuro. Then came foreign travel, and then

pedestrian wanderings on the wildest shores of England and Wales, Highland rambles, excursions in Western Ireland, a long apprenticeship to that grand mistress, Nature, who is a better teacher than all the masters who ever created academicians. And at last the young painter established himself in a lodging at Highbury, and began to paint for his daily bread.

Then it was that his friend Mr. Gee introduced him to William Crawford, the great painter, who employed the embryo Turner to paint backgrounds for delicious little sketches that could have been covered half-a-dozen inches deep by the sovereigns that were given for them.

The young man accepted the employment, but disdained himself for accepting it, until there came an angel into the painting-room one day to take the painter's soul captive, and reconcile him to any lot that brought him near her. The angel was Florence, only child and spoiled darling of William Crawford, who came to ask her father for a cheque for her milliner. She was an angel with a tiny *retroussé* nose, and dark-gray eyes, that

were generally mistaken for black; an impulsive angel with a temper that was more capricious than an April day.

For some time after that meeting in the painting-room, Philip believed that he admired Miss Crawford only as the most beautiful thing he had ever seen; but he woke one day to the knowledge that he loved her to distraction, and that the happiness of his life was as utterly at her mercy as the little golden toys hanging from her chatelaine, which she had so pretty a trick of trifling with when she talked to him.

Of all men upon earth, perhaps William Crawford was the least tainted by any odour of snobbishness. No intoxicating sense of triumph bewildered him on the giddy height to which he had risen. He stood serene upon the mountain top; for he looked upward to the starry Valhalla of dead painters—whose glory seemed as high above him as the stars in which he could fancy them dwelling—and not downward to the struggling wayfarers he had left behind him.

"If people knew as much about painting as

I do, they wouldn't believe in my pictures," said Mr. Crawford.

He had rivals—rivals whom he envied and adored—against whose giant hands his own seemed to him so feeble and puny; but their names were Rembrandt and Velasquez, Rubens and Reynolds, Titian and Correggio, Guido and Vandycke. To him art seemed a grand republic, a brotherhood in which success had no power to divide a man from his brethren. He was rich, and he spent his money royally, for he was as fond of splendour as Rubens himself; and he had not Peter Paul's affection for gold. Perhaps no man who was equally successful ever had so few enemies as William Crawford. Young men adored him, struggling men came to him for advice, disappointed men poured their wrongs into his ears and took comfort from his sympathy. He was the ideal painter, and he ought to have sat in the pillared hall of some old Roman palace, with a band of faithful followers watching the free sweep of his inspired hand, and an emperor in attendance to pick up his maulstick. In this

strong white teeth together fiercely, and muttered:

"I *will* succeed!"

It was not to have his name inscribed upon the mighty roll where blaze the names of Raffaelle and Correggio that the young man aspired with such a passionate yearning, but to have an *entrée* in the West-end mansions where Florence Crawford was to be met.

CHAPTER II.

LORD ASPENDELL'S DAUGHTER.

When the brilliant stream of carriages had poured out of Apsley Gate; when the Serpentine blushed redly in the low western sunlight; when the fashionable world had gone homeward in barouches and landaus, britzskas and phaetons, to dash through the dusky park two hours hence in tiny miniature broughams, with lamps that flash like meteors through the night; when a solemn twilight calm had come down upon the dusty greensward, and the tinkling of a sheep-bell made a rustic sound in the stillness; when a town-bred Gray might have sat beside the placid water meditating an elegy in a West-end park,—a lumbering old chariot was very often to be seen creeping up and down the Lady's Mile. It was a shabby

old carriage, with a ponderous drab hammer-cloth which the moths had eaten away in bare patches here and there,—a faded old carriage which might have been bright and splendid long ago, when lovely Margaret, Countess of Blessington, was to be seen in the Lady's Mile, and genial Lord Palmerston was called Cupid. But now in the still gloaming this dismal equipage might have been mistaken for some phantom chariot haunting the scene of departed glories. The pale face looking out at the window would have assisted the delusion, so lifeless was its changeless calm—a beautiful, melancholy, patrician face. You might have fancied you beheld the unreal image of a forgotten belle, a ghost of beauty gliding in her shadowy chariot beneath the spreading branches which had looked down upon her triumphs years and years ago.

You might have thought this if you were prone to sentimental musings in the tender twilight; but if you were a sober, practical person, you would most likely have found out who the lady was, and all about her. She was Lady Cecil Chudleigh,

orhpan daughter of Lord Aspendell; and she was the unpaid companion, the unrecompensed dependent upon the elderly dowager to whom the phantom chariot belonged, and who sat far back in the vehicle, while her beautiful niece looked sadly out upon the rosy bosom of the Serpentine.

In all the world Lady Cecil had no other friend or protector than the dowager, who was the widow of an Anglo-Indian general, and only surviving sister of the dead Countess of Aspendell. The Anglo-Indian warrior had distinguished himself at more places ending with "pore" and "bad" than can be enumerated without weariness, had lived a life of reckless and barbaric extravagance in despite of all feminine remonstrance, and had died, leaving his widow very little except his pension and a house-full of Indian shawls, embroidered muslins, sandal-wood boxes, beetle-baskets, and Trichinopoly jewelry.

After the general's death, Mrs. MacClaverhouse —the warrior was of Scottish extraction, and claimed kindred with the hero of Killiecrankie,—

after her husband's death the widow had sold the lease of the great house in Portland Place, in whose pillared dining-room the general had been wont to entertain all the notabilities of the three presidencies, and beneath whose sheltering roof he had staggered half tipsy to bed every night for the last ten years of his life. She sold the lease, and the furniture, and the very curious old ports, and constantias, and madeiras; but she kept all the bangles and sandal-wood, the beetles' wings, and gorgeous scarfs and shawls and table-covers, and a very nice little selection from the rare old wines, and a small stock of the plate, and glass and china, and table-linen, which the magnificent general had chosen, of such splendid quality; and with these she retired to furnished apartments on the quietest side of Dorset Square. She kept the chariot in which she had driven and visited for the last twenty years of her life, and the fat gray horses that had drawn it; but she sent the equipage to a livery-stable in the neighbourhood of her new abode, and she bargained with the proprietor for a sober coachman at five-and-twenty shillings a

week; a coachman who wore the stable-yard livery, and was sometimes almost disreputable about the legs and feet.

And then one day she went down to Brighton, where the Earl of Aspendell and his only daughter had been living for the last ten years, in a tiny cottage on the Dyke Road, with a little grass-plat before the windows, and dimity curtains fluttering from the open casements—so poor, so friendless, so dignified in their unpretending seclusion. There was very little trouble connected with pecuniary misfortune which Cecil Chudleigh had not known. The extravagance of a father's youth, repented of too late; the wild follies of a brother's mad career—never repented of at all, but cut suddenly short by a fatal false step on a frozen mountain-side, amidst the desolate grandeur of the Alps; a cheerless home; a mother's slow decay, half physical, half mental; and the weary task of beguiling the monotonous days of a ruined and remorseful spendthrift: sorrows such as these had darkened the young life, and hushed the silvery laugh, and transformed the girl of seven-

teen into a woman drooping under the burden of a woman's heaviest cares.

It was only when the Earl of Aspendell and his folly were buried together in a corner of the little hill-side churchyard, where Captain Tattersall the loyal, and Phœbe Hessel the daring, sleep so quietly; it was only when Cecil was quite desolate, and sat with the *Times* newspaper in her lap, staring hopelessly at the advertisements, and wondering whether she was clever enough to be a governess,—it was then only that Marion MacClaverhouse thought fit to trouble herself about the fate of her dead sister's only surviving child. Her brother-in-law's death happened "fortunately," as she said herself, in the Brighton season; and as she had no invitation for the current month, Mrs. MacClaverhouse decided on paying a brief visit to Brighton. The widow was of a prudent turn of mind, and contrived to save money out of her limited income;—for a rainy day, she said. She had been saving odd pounds and shillings and sixpences for this anticipated wet weather ever since her marriage, and as yet

Jupiter Pluvius had been pitiful, and had restrained his fury.

She went to the little Dyke-Road cottage to see Cecil Chudleigh—to inspect her, it may be said, so sharply did she scrutinise, so closely did she interrogate the girl. But Lady Cecil's mind was too candid to shrink from questioning; and she thought her aunt most nobly generous when that lady proposed to adopt her henceforward as companion, reader, amanuensis, and prop and comfort to her declining years. Lady Cecil certainly did not happen to know that the widow had been for some time on the look-out for a suitable person as companion and drudge, and had only failed to suit herself because, in her own words, "the impertinent creatures wanted such preposterous salaries, and asked if I allowed port at luncheon, as their physicians had ordered it. Their physicians, indeed! a dispensary-surgeon, or the parish-apothecary, I should think!" cried the widow, impatiently; for she was an energetic and plain-speaking person, who was always proclaiming her want of "common patience"

with the failings and follies of her fellow-creatures.

Lady Cecil went home with the dowager, and ministered very patiently to her wants and pleasures, and read the newspapers to her, and beat down the tradespeople, and disputed about stray entries of mutton-chops and half-pounds of tea that had or had not been supplied, and counted the glass, and was responsible for the spoons, and trembled when the widow's own parlour-maid chipped a morsel out of one of the general's tumblers; for was it not her duty to see that neither glass nor china was broken, and that the silver *entrée*-dishes, salvers, butter-boats, and tea-trays were rubbed with the hand only, and not scratched and smudged with a greasy, gritty leather? Cecil's own pretty pink palms helped to clean the dowager's plate sometimes when there was a festival in Dorset Square.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse was very fond of society, and entertained innumerable elderly warriors and judges of the Sudder, with their wives and daughters, in her stuffy little dining-room. The

splendid silver and glass were set forth, the rare old wines were brought out very often in the London season, and Lady Cecil bowed under the burden of a new kind of care, and went to sleep oppressed by the terror of a tablespoon missing from the plate-basket, or a butter-boat that had not been put away.

Sometimes she felt a sick yearning for the old monotonous days with her father; for when they were saddest there had been a tender quiet in their sadness. In the new life there might be no sorrow, but then there was such continual worry. The burdens laid upon her were very small ones, but then there were so many of them; and every day it seemed as if the last straw would be added to the heap, and she must sink down in the dust and die.

The dowager was not unkind to her niece; for she was too much a woman of the world not to know when she had a good servant, and to rejoice in the fact that she possessed that treasure at the cheapest possible rate. She was not unkind, but she was pitiless. She called

Cecil "my dear," and bought her pretty dresses—pretty dresses that were to be had cheap after stock taking, at the West-end haberdashers, dainty gauzes with the bloom off them, and muslins with soiled edges; she gave her good food, and persuaded her to take half-glasses of tawny port, which the girl, in her secret soul, thought more nasty than physic; but if Lady Cecil had been dying, Mrs. MacClaverhouse would have come to her death-bed to demand the inventory of the china, and to ask if it were six or eight shell-and-thread pattern salt-spoons that had been intrusted to the parlour-maid for the last dinner-party.

For three years Lady Cecil had lived on the dullest side of Dorset Square, and counted the glasses and spoons, and battled with the Marylebone tradesmen, and ridden in the phantom chariot. In all those three years there had been only one break in the drudgery of her life, only one glimpse of sunshine; but then it was such a dazzling burst of light, such a revelation of paradise. Ah, let my pen fall lightly on

the paper as I write the story of that tender dream!

It was the habit of Mrs. MacClaverhouse to spend as much of her time in visiting as was thoroughly agreeable to her acquaintance. She liked visiting because it was pleasant and cheap; but she was too wise a woman to wear out her welcome, and no one had ever uttered the obnoxious word 'sponge' in conjunction with her name. She was lively and agreeable—rather vulgar perhaps, but then genteel people are permitted to be vulgar—clever, well dressed, of high family and acknowledged position, and she gave cosy little dinners in the season; so there were many houses in which she and her niece were favourite guests in the cheery winter days when an old country-house is such a paradise. Poor Cecil found herself sometimes looking anxiously after other people's spoons and forks in these pleasant holiday times, or taking a mental photograph of a cold sirloin or a raised pie as it was removed from the breakfast-table; for one of her home-duties was to register the appearances

of joints and poultry before they descended into the territory of the landlady, who might or might not be honest. Mrs. MacClaverhouse made a point of never quite believing in people's honesty.

"Don't tell me that I've known them for years and never known them rob me!" exclaimed the widow. "They may have robbed me without my knowing it, or they may not have robbed me because I never gave them the opportunity; and they may begin to rob me to-morrow if they get the chance. Look at the Bishop of Northlandshire's butler, who had lived with him thirteen years, and ran away with five hundred pounds' worth of plate in the fourteenth. Look at Sir Harry Hinchliffe's valet, who was such a faithful creature that his master left him an annuity of two hundred a year; which he would have enjoyed very much, no doubt, if he hadn't stripped the house while his benefactor's corpse was lying in it, and had not been transported for life in consequence. Don't talk to me about honesty, Cecil. If Mrs. Krewson is an honest woman, why do her eyes sparkle so when I order

a large joint, and why are two quarts of Bisque barely enough for six?"

In the autumn Mrs. MacClaverhouse generally retired to some marine retreat unfrequented by cockneys or fashionables, where lodgings were to be had on reasonable terms, and where she could recruit herself and her niece for the winter campaign.

"I really don't see why you shouldn't marry well, Cecil,—though Heaven knows what will become of the General's diamond-cut glass when you leave me,—and I sometimes wonder how it is you haven't made a good match before now," said the widow. "I think it's that cold manner of yours that keeps the men off; and then you don't talk slang, as some of the women do nowadays. You're not dashing, you know, my love; but you are very handsome, and elegant, and accomplished; and if any one of those flippant minxes can sing Rossini's music or write an inventory of china as well as you, I'll eat her —pearl-powder and all," added Mrs. Mac, with a wry face.

It was very true that as yet no pretender of any importance had appeared for Lady Cecil Chudleigh's hand. It might be that lovers were kept off by the cold reserve of her manners, the shrinking dislike to take any prominent part in society which is apt to affect those whom poverty has always kept more or less at a disadvantage, or it might be in consequence of that panic in the matrimonial market of which we have heard so much in these latter days.

The dowager had been quite sincere when she spoke of her niece's beauty. There were few handsomer faces to be seen in the Lady's Mile than that which looked wistfully out of the phantom chariot. It was a pale face—pale with no muddled, sickly whiteness, or bilious yellow, but that beautiful pallor which is so rare a charm, —a pensive, patrician face, with a slender aquiline nose, and dark hazel eyes. People liked to see Lady Cecil in their rooms, even when she wore her plainest white muslin, and kept herself most persistently in a shadowy corner, so unmistakable were her rank and breeding. Young men who

complained that she had so little to say for herself, and lamented the absence of a mysterious quality called "go" in her manners, confessed that her profile was more beautiful than the finest cameo in the Louvre, and her style unexceptionable.

"If polygamy were admissible, I'd marry Lady Cecil to-morrow," remarked a gentleman of the genus Swell. "She is the woman of women to sit at the head of a fellow's table and do him credit in society; but if I were going home half-seas-over after a four-in-hand club-dinner at Richmond, I'd as soon have Lady Macbeth sitting up for me as Lord Aspendell's daughter. Not that she'd be coarse or low, like the Scotchwoman, you know — not a bit of it. She'd receive me with a stately curtsey, and freeze me to death with her classic profile. Egad! when you come to think of it, you know, old fellow, there must be a hitch somewhere in the matrimonial law. Society doesn't confine a man to one horse; society doesn't compel him to ride his park-hack across country, or harness his racing

stud to his drag; and yet society limits an unhappy beast to one wife; and if he marries a nice little indulgent creature who won't look black at him when he goes home late or smokes in the dining-room, the odds are that she'll freeze his marrow by dropping her h's and talking of her par—who was something in the soap-boiling way—at an archbishop's state-dinner."

In the second autumn of Lady Cecil's dependence the dowager carried her niece and her parlour-maid to a pretty little village on the Hampshire coast—a sleepy little village, where the fruit was blown off the trees in farmers' orchards by the fresh breath of ocean breezes—a village nestling under the shadow of brown, sun-burnt hills, a long, straggling street of rustic cottages, with here and there a quaint old gabled dwelling-place of a better class, shut in by moss-grown walls, and nestling in such gardens as are to be seen on that south-western coast. Very few cockney visitors ever invaded the drowsy hamlet of Fortinbras, where the watering-place *habitué* would have looked in vain for the cliffs or the jetty, the

brazen band and the buff slippers, the Ethiopian serenaders and the wheel of fortune—so dear to his cockney soul. At Fortinbras there were only two bathing-machines, and the sole attraction which the place possessed for sightseers was a grand old Norman castle, whose mighty keep towered high above the farmyards and orchards, and within whose walls red-shirted cricketers met on sunny summer afternoons, and whither village Sunday-school children came now and then to feast on buns and tea.

The coast of Fortinbras was low and flat and weedy, and sometimes a faint odour of stale sea-weed floated up from the shining sands on the evening air. Your cockney would have fled aghast from the place as "un'ealthy;" but for Lady Cecil the rustic village and the weedy coast had an odour of Longfellow and Tennyson that was delicious to her soul; and she felt as if she would have been unutterably happy if she could have bidden an eternal farewell to Dorset Square and Mrs. MacClaverhouse's plate-chest and china closet, to take up her abode under the shelter

of the Norman castle and the grassy hills for the rest of her life.

She wandered alone on the wet sands while her aunt took an after-dinner nap on the first evening of their arrival. She lingered by the cool gray sea, and watched the changing glories of the low western sky in a kind of rapture.

"And there are people who like Dorset Square better than this," she thought, "O, dear, dear lonely place, how I love you!"

Was it only a sensuous delight in the beautiful sky, the cool breezy atmosphere, the rustic calm? or was it because the happiest days of her life were to be spent on this weedy shore? If a coming sorrow casts its ominous shadow on the foredoomed creature who is to suffer it, should no prophetic sunshine herald the coming of a joy? Lady Cecil was happier that August evening than she ever remembered having been in her life, and there was a faint bloom on her cheeks, like the pinky heart of a wild rose, when she went home to the pretty cottage, half grange, half villa, which Mrs. MacClaverhouse had hired

for the season—"for a mere song, my dear; and a duck, for which that extortionate Jiffles would have the audacity to charge me four shillings, I get here for half-a-crown," wrote the dowager to a friend and confidante.

Cecil found her aunt in very high spirits.

"You've heard me talk a good deal of my husband's nephew, Hector Gordon, the only son of Andrew Gordon, the great contractor. Yes, I know that a person who contracts seems something horribly vulgar, and that's what Margaret MacClaverhouse's grand friends said when she married him. But Andrew Gordon was as polished a gentleman as ever sat in parliament—and he did sit there, my dear, and he does to this day; and Scotchmen, whose pride has a good deal that's noble in it, don't think it a more degrading thing to make money honestly by straightforward commerce than to get rich by time-bargains and rigging the market. I know there are people to this day who are inclined to look down upon Hector, and when he joined the Eleventh there was one man—a freckled, flaxen-haired

creature with weak eyes, whose father was a money-lending attorney—who tried to get up a laugh against our boy by asking some questions about Andrew's business transactions. I don't know *what* Hector said or did, Cecil; but I know the young man never tried to sneer at him again, and sold out shortly afterwards because his sight was too weak for India. You've heard me talk about the boy till you're almost tired of his name, I daresay, my dear."

Cecil smiled. She was thinking how many of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's pet subjects she had grown weary of within the two years of her slavery, and that this womanly talk of the favourite nephew was the least obnoxious of them.

"It is only natural that you should be fond of him," she said.

"You'd have some reason to say so, Cecil, if you'd known him when he was four years old," answered her aunt. "At four I think he was the loveliest child that ever was created. Such blue eyes! not your wishy-washy, milk-and-water colour that some parents call blue, but as deep

and dark as that purple convolvulus in the vase yonder." And then the widow went on to relate to Cecil the very familiar legend of how poor Margaret went off into a consumption soon after the infant's birth, and how she, being alone in England at the time, took up her abode in Andrew Gordon's house, to superintend the rearing of the child,—"which saved my expenses elsewhere, and was doing a favour to the poor helpless widower," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse parenthetically; "and then, you know, my dear, the General, being particularly fond of children, like most people who have none of their own, took a tremendous fancy to his poor sister's child; so nothing would do but that the boy must be continually in Portland Place whenever his uncle was in England, and I'm sure I wonder that darling child's constitution was not completely ruined by the mangoes and chutnee and raging hot curries the General allowed him to eat. And when Hector was at Oxford, and my husband had settled down after the last Affghan war, it was just the same. I think the young man spent as much of his time in Portland

Place as at the University; and it was the General who put a military career into his head, much to his father's annoyance; for Andrew would have liked him to go into the House and preach about poor-laws, and national surveys, and main-drainage, and such-like. However, whatever Hector wished was sure to be done sooner or later; for I do believe there never was a young man so completely spoiled by every body belonging to him; and the end of it was that his father bought him a commission in the 11th Plungers, as you know."

Yes, the story was a very old one for Cecil. She had listened with unfailing patience to her aunt's prosy discourses about Hector Gordon; and as the dowager was generally in a good temper when she talked of him, her niece had no unpleasant association with his name. But familiar as his graces and merits had become to her, through the praises of his aunt, Cecil felt no special interest in the young captain. She knew that he had been a good son and a brave soldier; but then there are so many good sons and brave soldiers in the world.

She knew that he had distinguished himself in India by doing something desperate in connection with a fort; but then young men in India are always doing desperate things in connection with forts. If ever any image of Hector Gordon presented itself to Lady Cecil's imagination, it took the shape of a clumsy Scotchman, with high cheek-bones and sandy hair. Mrs. MacClaverhouse called his hair auburn; but then that word auburn has such a wide signification.

Cecil listened to the old, old story of Hector's childhood to-night as patiently as she had been wont to listen any time within the last two years; but even calm queenly Lady Cecil Chudleigh was a little startled when the dowager exclaimed:

"And now, my dear, I am going to surprise you. Hector Gordon will be here to breakfast with us to-morrow morning—"

"Auntie!"

"He will arrive with the London papers, at a quarter before twelve o'clock. We must have fried soles, and mutton cutlets, and Worcester sauce, and potted game, and all those coarse high-

seasoned things that men like; and you can put a little fruit on the table to make it look pretty; which, of course, will do for dessert afterwards; and you will have to give out the tea and coffee service, and half-a-dozen large forks. I only hope and pray the servants here are honest. If it wasn't for that tiresome lion prancing upon every atom of silver, one might persuade servants and people that it was all electro—"

"But, auntie," said Cecil, heedless of the housekeeping details, "I thought Captain Gordon was in India."

"And so did I, my dear: but it seems he has come home on sick leave—not ill, he tells me, but only knocked up by climate and hard work; and he went to Dorset Square yesterday morning unannounced, on purpose to surprise me—the consequence of which was that he found me out of the way, as people generally do when they plan those romantic surprises; and he has brought me an Indian shawl, because I am so fond of Indian shawls, he says. That's always the way with people. If they see you suffering from a plethora

of any kind of property, they take it into their heads that you have a passion for that especial class of property, and rush to buy you more of it. I've no common patience with such folly."

Perhaps Mrs. MacClaverhouse said this because it was her habit to be sharp and unsparing, and she found herself too much inclined to melt into weak motherly tenderness when she spoke of her nephew. Now the hero of all the old nursery and schoolboy stories was so near at hand, Cecil Chudleigh began to think of him a little more seriously than ever she had done before. He was weak and ill, no doubt, his aunt said, in spite of his assurances to the contrary; and in that case he must be kept in the sleepy Hampshire village, and nursed till he was strong again.

"And you must help to nurse him, Cecil," said the widow; "and if by any chance he should happen to fall in love with you, be sure you remember that he's a better match than one out of fifty of the young men you meet in London—and Heaven knows they're scarce enough nowadays. If you weren't my sister's own child I wouldn't

throw you in his way, for Hector might marry any woman in England; but at the worst it would sound well for his wife's name to have a handle to it."

Lady Cecil's face was dyed with a hot, indignant blush.

"I am not the sort of person to be fascinated by Captain Gordon's money, aunt MacClaverhouse," she said.

"Perhaps not," answered the old lady, coolly; "but you may fall in love with him."

Cecil was too angry to answer. That the dowager should talk coolly of Hector Gordon, the contractor's son, as a great catch for the descendant of Aspendells and Chudleighs, who had helped to vanquish his countrymen at Flodden, stung the Earl's daughter to the very heart. She had so little but her grand old lineage left her, that it was scarcely strange she should be proud of it. There came a time, not many weeks after this August evening, when she looked back and thought what a delicious thing it must have been to have her name coupled with *his*, and to be ignorant that there was any wrong in the association.

But to-night she was wounded and indignant, and though she went out into the kitchen-premises by and by to give orders about the cutlets, and the soles, and the potted meats for the Plunger captain's breakfast, her heart was not in the duty, and she sent none of those little messages to the butcher which a woman would have done who loved the coming cutlet-consumer. She thought how unpleasant it would be to have a clumsy Scottish invalid lying on the sofa in the cosy little drawing-room, where she had hoped to read Tennyson and Owen Meredith all by herself, in the warm, drowsy afternoons. And the time came, and so soon, when no sofa that Gillow could devise would have seemed soft enough for so dear a visitor; when every glimmer of sunshine or breath of summer air in that cosy drawing-room was watched and calculated as closely as if a valuable life had depended upon the adjustment of the venetians, or the opening and shutting of the French windows.

Lady Cecil went out upon the seashore after an early cup of tea on the morning that was to

witness Hector Gordon's arrival. She had arranged a pile of dewy plums nestling in their dark-green leaves, and a basket of hothouse grapes, with her own hands, for she had the magical touch whereby some women can impart beauty to common things. She had surveyed the breakfast-table, and had given orders as to the moment at which the tea and coffee were to be made, and the fish put into the frying-pan; and she left a message for her aunt to the effect that she was gone for a long walk, and would not be home to breakfast. It would be so much better, she fancied, to leave the widow and her nephew *tête-à-tête* on this first morning of the soldier's arrival. She had done her duty conscientiously, and having done it, she went out to breathe the sweet morning air, and shake off the unpleasant idea of the coming Scotchman.

"I have been tolerably comfortable with my aunt so far," she thought, "in spite of the spoons and forks; but now I shall only interfere with her enjoyment of this dreadful Scotchman's society. O, papa, papa, how I miss you, and the dreary

little house on the Dyke Road, where we lived so peacefully together, with all the winds of heaven howling round us, and rattling our windows in the dead of the night!"

She went under the ponderous archway beneath which a portcullis still hung, and into the grassy enclosure which had once been the muster-ground of the castle. At this early hour there were neither Sunday-school children nor exploring visitors among the old gray ruins. The fresh sea-breezes fluttered the little plume in Lady Cecil's hat, and blew all thoughts of vexation out of her mind. She mounted the winding stair of the keep—a dangerous, treacherous stair, which had been worn by the tread of mailed feet in the days that were gone, and the buff boots of excursionists from the Isle of Wight in this present age. She went to the very top of the great Norman tower, high up above all grievances about Hector Gordon and his breakfast, and emerged upon the battlements, a fragile, fluttering little figure, amid that massive mediæval stonework, whose gray ruin was grander than the most elaborate glories of modern architecture.

She had heard the whistle of the engine as she entered the castle, and she imagined that at this moment Hector Gordon must be installed at the breakfast-table; "devouring chops," she thought, with a contemptuous little grimace. It is so natural for a girl of nineteen to think meanly of a man who is below her in social status. To Philip Foley, painting in his Highbury lodging, and dressed in a threadbare shooting-jacket, Lady Cecil Chudleigh would have been unspeakably gracious; but for a scion of the Caledonian plutocracy she had nothing but good-natured contempt.

"He is an invalid, poor fellow," she thought; "I am sure it is very wicked of me to think his visit a bore."

She settled matters with her conscience by determining to be very attentive to the physical comforts of her aunt's favourite.

"I daresay he would like some salmon for dinner," she thought; "I'll call at the fishmonger's as I go home."

And then she took a volume of Victor Hugo's poetry from her pocket, and began to read.

The noble verse carried her aloft on its mighty pinions, high up into some mystic region a million miles above the battlements of the Norman tower. She had an idea that she could not leave her aunt and Captain Gordon too long undisturbed on this particular morning, and she abandoned herself altogether to the delight of her book. It was so seldom that she was able to entirely forget that there were such things as silver forks and dishonest servants in the world.

Even to-day she was not allowed to be long unconscious of the outer world, for when she had been reading about twenty minutes she heard a voice close beside her exclaim:

"I am so glad you like Victor Hugo. Pray forgive me for being so impertinent as to look over your shoulder; but I have been searching for you every where, and I am to take you home to breakfast, please; if you are Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and I am almost sure you are."

She started to her feet, and looked at the speaker. He was the handsomest man she had ever seen—tall, and grand, and fair, the very type

of a classic hero, she fancied, as he stood before her on the battlements, with the winds lifting the short auburn curls from his bare forehead. He was no more like the traditional Scotchman than the Duke d'Aumâle is like one of Gilray's Frenchmen. There was no more odour of the parvenu about him than about a Bayard or a Napier. In all her life she had never seen any one like him. It was not because he was handsome that she was struck by his appearance; for she had generally hated handsome men as the most obnoxious of their species. It was because he was—himself.

For once in her life, Lord Aspendell's daughter, whose calm reserve was so near akin to *hauteur*, was fairly startled.

"And are you really Captain Gordon?" she asked, amazed.

"I am indeed; and that question tells me that I was right, and you are Lady Cecil, and we are—at least we ought to be—cousins, since dear aunt MacClaverhouse stands in the same relation to both of us."

CHAPTER III.

HECTOR.

THE trio in the little breakfast-parlour in Sea-View Cottage, Fortinbras, was perhaps one of the pleasantest parties that ever met at so simply furnished a board. The spirit of the immortal Cliquot, whose vintages have made his widow's name so celebrated, may have smiled contemptuously at such a breakfast-table, on which the strongest beverages were tea and coffee; the mighty chiefs of Philippe's and the Maison Dorée would have held up their hands and shrugged their shoulders with amazement if told that these benighted insulars could really enjoy these coarse viands, and feel no national craving for suicide, or national tendency to spleen, before the barbarous meal was concluded. And yet there are few *cabinets particuliers* on the Boulevards whose

gaudily-papered walls have ever echoed to happier laughter than that of the young Indian hero, as he gave a serio-comic rendering of his adventures, warding off all praise of great and gallant deeds by the playful tone which made peril seem a joke, and desperate valour the most commonplace quality of man.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse would have been pleased to listen all day to the voice of that charmer of six feet two, but her sharp matronly eye perceived presently that the stalwart Plunger looked pale and worn, and was by no means unqualified for the sick-list; so she sent Lady Cecil to the drawing-room to see to the arrangement of the venetians, and then she led her boy to the sofa, which was not nearly long enough for him, and had to be eked out with chairs. The Captain remonstrated energetically against this sybarite treatment, but his aunt was inflexible; and as he was very familiar with the strength of her will, he laid himself down at last as meekly as a child.

"And you can read to us, Cecil," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse, producing her knitting-needles,

and an uncompromising gray-worsted sock, such as Robert Burns may have worn when his plough turned up the immortal daisy. The dowager knitted these worsted instruments of torture for a Dorcas society, which she honoured with her patronage and a very small annual subscription.

"Come, Cecil," she said presently, when her niece came softly into the room after a mysterious visit to the cook, "Hector has been amusing us all the morning, and the least we can do is to amuse him this afternoon. Suppose you read him to sleep."

If the Scottish warrior had been any thing like the image she had made of him in her mind, Cecil Chudleigh would have been very much disposed to rebel against this command. But there are some people born to walk upon roses and to inhale the perfumed breath of incense; and Hector Gordon was one of them. His nurses had idolised him, his father had worshipped him, his uncle and aunt had spoiled him, his brother officers of the Plungers loved him, and dressed after him, and talked after him, and thought after him; and with that feminine

admiration, that subtle and delicious flattery which is the most intoxicating of all earthly incense, Hector had been almost surfeited. He was very delightful. The freshness and brightness of an unsullied youth pervaded every tone of his voice, every thought in his mind, every ringing note of his genial laugh—so hearty without loudness, so exuberant without vulgarity. Perhaps his greatest charm lay in the fact that he was young, and did not consider his youth a thing to be ashamed of. And there are so few young men nowadays. Much has been said about the irresistible witchery of a polished Irishman, the delightful vivacity of a well-born Frenchman. But has any one ever sung the graces of a high-bred Scotchman? What words can fairly describe the nameless fascination which has a dash of the Irishman's insidious flattery, a spice of the Frenchman's brilliant vivacity, but which has a tender softness possessed by neither, a patrician grace not to be equalled by any other nationality in the world? In all the history of modern Europe, the two people who, by manner alone, have exercised the most powerful influence

upon their contemporaries, have been Mary Queen of Scots, and her great-grandson Charles Stuart. Of all the poets, who has ever so enthralled the hearts of women as George Gordon, Lord Byron, whose maternal lineage was Scotch? Of all lovely and fascinating women whose names will be remembered in the future, is there any fairer or lovelier than Eugénie Marie de Guzman, Countess of Teba, Empress of the French, and scion of the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn?

There are flowers that flourish in the sunshine, and flowers that thrive only in the shade; and as it is in the vegetable, so is it in the animal kingdom. There are men whom a perpetual atmosphere of adulation would have transformed into supercilious fops or selfish profligates. Hector Gordon made no such vile return for the tenderness which had been so freely lavished upon him. High-minded and generous-hearted, brave as a Leonidas or a Clyde, he was no bad example for the young men who formed themselves upon him. It was said that there was less bill-discounting and card-playing amongst the officers of the 11th Plungers

than in any other cavalry regiment in the service; for it is your dashing young captain rather than your middle-aged colonel who gives the tone to the youngsters of a mess. They may obey their commanding-officer, but they will copy their brilliant companion.

But it must not be supposed that under any circumstances Hector Gordon could have come under the denomination of "a good young man;" for it seems an understood thing that the typical good young man must be nothing but good. Hector was neither evangelical nor Puseyite in his tendencies; but rather of that good, easy-going broad church, which winks good-naturedly at a parson in "pink," and sees no criminality in a cheerful rubber. He went to church once or twice on a Sunday, as the case might be; and did his best to join earnestly in the service, and to listen with sustained attention to the sermon. If his thoughts wandered now and then to the Highland peaks, amidst whose lonely grandeurs he had once shot a mighty white eagle, or to the deer-stalking adventures or grouse-shooting of the

last autumn; if his fancy played him false and brought some bright girlish face before him, with the memory of one especially delicious waltz, and one peculiarly intoxicating flirtation—if such small sins as these sullied his soul now and then when the sermon was duller and longer than it should have been, it must be remembered that he was very young, and that the chastening influence of sorrow had not yet shadowed his life, or lessened his delight in the common pleasures of his age.

Lying on the sofa, in the low-roofed, old-fashioned drawing-room at Fortinbras, and shrouded by a leopard-skin railway-rug, which Mrs. Mac-Claverhouse had insisted on casting over him, the young Captain looked like an invalid Titan; but a Titan with a nimbus of waving auburn hair about his head, and the brightest blue eyes that ever took a fierce light amid the glare of battle, or softened to feminine tenderness when they looked on a woman's face. Lady Cecil contemplated her aunt's favourite at her leisure as she sat by an open window, with her face quite hidden in the shadow of drooping curtains and closed

venetians. And she had fancied him such a vulgar, clumsy creature—a freckled, red-haired object,—like a tobacconist's highlander in modern costume, a loutish Caledonian Hercules, with a Gaelic sing-song in his voice, and with no belief in any thing but the grandeur of Princes Street, Edinburgh, and the immortality of Robert Burns. Cecil Chudleigh looked at him slily from beneath the shadow of her long lashes, and smiled at the recollection of her old fancies.

"As if one's idea of a place or person were ever any thing like the reality," she thought. "I ought to have known that Captain Gordon would prove the very opposite of the image I had made of him."

She took up some books presently from the table near her, and looked at the titles.

"How can you ask me to read to Captain Gordon, auntie," she demanded, archly, "when you know we have no books or papers that can interest him? We have neither *Bell's Life*, nor the *United-Service Gazette;* nor yet 'Post and Scarlet,' or 'Silk and Paddock,' or whatever

those barbarous books are called that gentlemen are so fond of. I think there are some odd numbers of *Mr. Sponge's Sporting-Tour* in a cupboard in Dorset Square, and I daresay we could get them sent down by post; but for to-day—"

"Will you read some of Hugo's verses?" asked Captain Gordon. "I mustn't talk slang to a lady, or I would entreat you not to chaff me while I'm on the sick-list. I have read as much sporting literature as any man, I daresay, in my day; and *Post and Paddock* is a capital book, I do assure you, Lady Cecil; but I think I know my Tennyson too. I have recited 'Locksley Hall' from the first line to the last, out yonder, when we've been dreadfully hard-up for talk. And you should have seen how scared my *Kitmutghar* looked! I think he fancied our great Alfred's masterpiece was a volley of bad language; they're so unaccustomed to hear any thing *but* bad language from Englishmen, poor fellows. If I am really to be treated as an invalid, and dear foolish auntie here insists upon it, I will exercise my prerogative, and demand one of Hugo's odes."

Cecil opened the little volume that she had carried to the top of Fortinbras Keep, and turned the leaves listlessly, with slim white fingers that sparkled faintly with the gems in quaint old-fashioned rings.

She paused, with the volume open at those wonderful verses in which the classic sybarite bewails the weariness of his felicity; and, pushing the venetian shutter a little way open, she began to read, with a half-smile upon her face. The summer sunlight flooded her face and figure, and the summer air fluttered one loose tress of her dark-brown hair, as her head drooped over her book.

"D'implacables faveurs me poursuivent sans cesse,
Vous m'avez flétri dans ma fleur,
Dieux! donnez l'espérance à ma froide jeunesse,
Je vous rends tous ces biens pour un peu de bonheur."

When Cecil came to these closing lines of the sybarite's complaint, the Scottish Hercules flung off his leopard-skin, and walked across the little room to the open window by which Lady Cecil was seated.

"It's no use, auntie," he said; "I'm not an

invalid. If I loll upon that sofa, Lady Cecil will take me for a modern Celsus; and, upon my word, I *have* felt like that fellow once or twice in my life. I've never been exactly savage with Providence for giving me so many blessings; but I have felt as if I should like to have had a little more of the fun of wishing for things. Look at my position. I'm not used up, and I don't affect to be used up, like some fellows. I don't make a howling about having lost the faculty of pleasure, or the belief in my fellow-men, or any thing of that kind. I'm no disciple of Alfred de Musset, or Owen Meredith; but I really have run through the better part of the pleasures that last most men their lifetime. There's scarcely any thing in the way of adventure that you can propose to me that I haven't done, from tooling a drag along the Lady's Mile when the carriages were thickest, to ascending Mont Blanc or scaling a red-hot brick wall on a fireman's ladder. There's scarcely any route you can suggest to me for a holiday tour that I'm not as familiar with as Murray. And yet I'm only seven-and-twenty.

So long as we have plenty to do in India I shall be right enough; but if our fellows should ever come to be planted in country quarters, without any prospect of work, what's to become of me? And then I've promised to sell out in a few years," he added, in a much graver tone.

"Promised to sell out!" screamed Mrs. Mac-Claverhouse. "That's your father's doing, I know; but you won't leave the army until you marry, I suppose?"

"O no, not until I marry."

He took up the volume of poems which Cecil had laid down.

"Let me read to you, ladies," he said; "am I not here to minister to your pleasures and obey your behests? Tell me your favourites, Lady Cecil."

They discussed the book in his hand, and Cecil discovered that Captain Gordon was very familiar with the poet. He read well, and good reading is such a rare accomplishment. His accent was irreproachable; and if there was a charm in his full rich voice when he spoke English, the

charm was still greater when he spoke French. He spoke French and German to perfection, for he had been well grounded in both languages, though not very materially advanced in either at Eton or Oxford; and he had spent a considerable part of his youth wandering from city to city with a private tutor, a retired Austrian officer, who was both learned and accomplished, and who adored his pupil.

When two people, both under the age of thirty, discover that they admire the same poet, they have gone half-way towards a pleasant intimacy. After that discussion of Victor Hugo, and the reading aloud that followed, and the desultory talk about Germany and German literature, India and Indian politics, London, and common friends and acquaintances who were to be met there, that succeeded the poetical lecture, Lady Cecil Chudleigh quite forgot all her old fancies about Captain Gordon, and resigned herself to the idea of his visit.

And after this they were the best friends in the world, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse was quite

contented to allow Cecil a share in her boy's society. She was a very sensible woman in her way, and liked the society of young people when it was to be had cheaply. Hector and Cecil's animated discussions upon almost all subjects to be found between earth and heaven amused the widow as she basked in the sunshine, seated in her pet chair before a window with her favourite aspect. She astonished the young people very often by the shrewdness of the remarks with which she cut in upon them, smiting their pretty fanciful theories into atoms with the sledge-hammer of common-sense. Altogether she was very well satisfied with the aspect of affairs. If the motherless lad whom she loved so tenderly, and thought of as a lad in spite of his seven-and-twenty years, —if Hector Gordon had been a landless younger son, with his fortune to carve out for himself, Mrs. MacClaverhouse would no doubt have loved him dearly, for the sake of his blue eyes and his frank handsome face, his generous nature and gladsome soul; but she would scarcely perhaps have loved him quite so much, or looked for his

coming quite so gladly under such circumstances as she did now, when all the blessings or pleasures that wealth can purchase attended his footsteps wherever he went, and created an atmosphere of luxury around and about the dwelling in which he lived. A hungry nephew, always hard-up, and in need of pecuniary assistance, would have been a heavy trial to Mrs. MacClaverhouse.

Nothing could have been more delightful to the dowager than the Captain's manner of opening the campaign on the morning after his arrival. They had breakfasted early this time, for Hector insisted that he was well enough to get up with the birds if necessary, and that so far as any claim to feminine compassion or to sick-leave went, he was the veriest impostor in existence. It was after the little party had dawdled considerably over the breakfast-table, and when Cecil had departed to hold solemn council with the cook, that Hector addressed his relative.

"Now, my dear auntie," he said, "it's essentially necessary that you and I should understand

each other. In the first place, I adore Fortinbras. I think it the most delightful place in the universe; and if the possessor of that delicious old castle would only be good enough to conceive an aversion for it, or find himself hopelessly insolvent, or something of that kind, I'd buy it of him to-morrow—Consols have risen an eighth since last Tuesday, and it's a good time for selling out—and restore it. Queen Elizabeth's drawing-room would make an admirable billiard-room, if it only had those necessary trifles—a floor and a ceiling. I'd make my hunting-stables out of the banqueting-hall—imagine a loose box with a wall four feet thick!—and I'd sleep in the topmost chamber of the great Norman tower, with a flag-staff swaying close above my head, and a general sensation of inhabiting a balloon. But all this is beside the question, auntie. What I want to say is, that I have fallen desperately in love with Fortinbras, and as I am likely to stay here till you become unutterably weary of my society, I must insist upon your accepting this cheque which I wrote this morning—for you know of old what an

expensive fellow I am, and I should feel perfectly miserable if I felt myself sponging on you without the least chance of returning your hospitality."

The Captain crumpled the folded cheque into his aunt's hand. The widow began some vague protest, but her nephew suffocated her scruples by a sonorous kiss; and whatever objections she urged against the receipt of his money were lost in the luxuriance of his beard.

"And now the next question is, how we are to enjoy ourselves?" exclaimed Hector, while his aunt speculated upon the figures inscribed on that crumpled scrap of paper, which her fingers so itched to unfold. "In the first place we must have a carriage; and in an exploration which I made this morning before you were up, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, I discovered that the only vehicle we can have is a shabby old fly, which began life as a britzska, and a shabby old pair of horses, which, in their early days, I suspect, have been employed in the agricultural interest; but as the shabby old carriage is clean and roomy, and as I am told the clumsy old horses are good at going,

and as a person in the position of that proverbial Hobson must not be fastidious, I have engaged the vehicle for the season. So now, my dearest auntie, prepare yourself for a chronic state of picnic. I have written to Fortnum and Mason to send us a cargo of picnic provisions—innumerable mahogany-coloured hams and tongues, and Strasburg pies, and potted fowl of all species, and all those wonderful preparations which taste of grease and pepper so much more than of any thing else. And I have found the most delightful nurseryman in the world, who will supply us with hothouse grapes and apricots; and the carriage will be here at twelve, so pray run away and put on your bonnet, auntie, and let Lady Cecil know all about our plans."

"You like Cecil?"

"Excessively. I think she is charming."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse shrugged her shoulders.

"You think every thing charming," she said.

She was familiar with his sanguine temperament, and his faculty for seeing every thing in its sunniest aspect.

"But I think Lady Cecil Chudleigh more charming than most things. I have seen very few women to compare with her, though she is by no means a showy beauty. I was struck by her profile as she sat in the sunlight yesterday. I never saw a more delicate outline, except in the face of the Empress Eugénie—and she has something of Eugénie's pensive gravity in her expression,—not pride, but the sort of thing which common-minded people mistake for pride. I think you have reason to be proud of such a niece. She ought to marry well."

"I hope she will," answered the widow.

If there was any special significance in her tone, Hector Gordon was too careless to be conscious of it. He walked to the open window, humming an Italian air from the last successful opera, and then he strolled out on the lawn, which was screened from the high road by a tall old-fashioned privet hedge and a modern bank of showy evergreens, across which the sea breezes blew fresh and cool. He was very happy, with an innocent boyish happiness, as he paced to and

fro upon the elastic turf, which seemed to spring under his light foot. In all his life he had never known any acute pain, any bitter grief. Of all possibilities in life the last thing which he could have imagined was that he had come to meet his first great sorrow here, where he was happy in the planning of such simple pleasures as might have seemed insipid to a modern schoolboy.

"What an old-fashioned fellow I am!" he thought, as he stopped with his hand in his pocket, searching for his cigar-case. "If any of my chums in the eleventh knew that I was looking forward to a day's ramble in a rumbling old fly with a couple of women, I think they'd cut me dead ever afterwards; and yet they're not such a bad lot of fellows, after all; only there's not one of them has pluck enough to own he can enjoy himself."

Captain Gordon had smoked out his cigar by the time the fly drove up to the garden gate. He threw the ash away, and shook the fumes of his cabana out of his hair and beard, and then went to meet the dowager and Lady Cecil; the dowager

stately in black-silk robes, which she possessed in all stages of splendour and shabbiness, and which she wore always, because it was "suitable for a person of my age, my dear, and by far the most economical thing one can wear," as she informed her confidantes. The Indian shawl—the shawl which the Captain had brought to Fortinbras in one of his portmanteaus—hung across Mrs. MacClaverhouse's arm, in compliment to the donor; and behind the widow came Cecil, in a pale muslin dress and scarf, and looking very lovely under the shelter of a broad leghorn hat.

They drove away in the bright summer sunshine, through country-lanes, where the breath of the sea came to them laden with the perfume of flowers; where rustic children ran out of cottage-doors to curtsey to them as they drove by, or even to set up a feeble cheer, as if the fly had been a triumphal chariot. The drive was a success; as, indeed, almost all things were on which Hector Gordon set his desire. Mrs. MacClaverhouse was radiant, for her inspection of the cheque had proved eminently satisfactory; Hector was de-

lightful, throwing his whole heart and soul into the task of amusing his companions—gay with the consciousness of pleasing, and with the *insouciance* of a man who has never known trouble; and if Lady Cecil was the most silent of the little party, it was only because she felt most deeply the delicious repose of the rustic scenery, the exquisite sweetness of the untainted atmosphere.

They had many such drives after this, exploring the country for twenty miles round Fortinbras. They held impromptu picnics on breezy heights above the level of the sea; picnics in which the rector of Fortinbras and his two pretty daughters were sometimes invited to join, and which ended with tea-drinking at Sea-View Villa, and croquet on the lawn; and then they had lonely drives to distant villages, where there were old Norman churches to be explored, under convoy of quavery old sextons, who always had to be fetched from their dinner or their tea; dusky old churches which Mrs. MacClaverhouse declined to enter, and in whose solemn gloom Hector and

Cecil dawdled together, discussing the dates of doors and windows, tombs and font, stalls and reading-desk, while the old sexton hovered respectfully in attendance, and while the dowager dozed delightfully in her carriage, lulled by the booming of excited bees. Sometimes Mrs. MacClaverhouse was too lazy to go out at all, and on those occasions the shabby fly and the shabby horses enjoyed a holiday, while Hector and Cecil strolled on the sands before the villa, or dawdled on the lawn.

They were very happy together. All Lady Cecil's proud reserve melted under the influence of the Scotchman's genial nature. It was simply impossible not to like him; it was very difficult to resist his fascination, the indescribable witchery that lurked in his manner when he wished to please. Lord Aspendell's daughter found herself forgetting how slight a link bound her to this pleasant companion, and admitting him to a cousinly intimacy before she had time to think of what she was doing; and then it was such an easy brotherly and sisterly friendship, that to draw

back from it would have seemed prudish and ungracious; so Cecil walked and talked with the young captain, and read and played to him in the evenings, and enjoyed to the full that delightful association which can only arise between two well-bred and highly educated people. If either of them had been ignorant or shallow, selfish or vain, such close companionship must have become intolerable at the end of a week. Every body knows how weary Madame du Deffand and President Henault grew of themselves and existence in less than twelve hours, when they met in a friend's deserted apartment, in order to escape from their visitors for the enjoyment of each other's society; but then Madame and the President were middle-aged lovers, and the freshness of youth was wanting to transform the place of their rendezvous into a paradise.

It was when Hector Gordon had been staying nearly a month at Fortinbras that the sharp-spoken and worldly dowager suddenly awakened Lady Cecil from that mental languor which had stolen upon her since his coming. He seemed to

have brought so much sunshine with him, and she had abandoned herself so entirely to the delight of its warmth and radiance, lulled by the belief that it was the change from Dorset Square to Fortinbras that had filled her heart and mind with such unwonted gladness.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had a very acute perception of all matters in which her own interests were in any way implicated, and she had woven a little scheme in relation to her nephew and niece. The dishonest steward, who made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, has many disciples in our modern day; and the dowager had certain views with regard to Captain Gordon's settlement in life—views which involved her enjoyment of a permanent home with the nephew she loved. It was for the furtherance of this little scheme that she sat at home so often while Hector and Cecil walked side by side upon the shore, or loitered in the garden; and this object was in her mind when she let them sing duets to her in the dusky drawing-room, and sank so often into gentle slumbers while they sang, or paused

to talk in voices that were hushed in harmony with the still twilight.

"I suppose you will scarcely turn up your nose *now*, Lady Cecil, if I venture to tell you that my nephew will be a first-rate match," exclaimed the dowager one morning, when she found herself alone with her niece.

Cecil blushed crimson.

"I—I—don't understand you, auntie," she stammered.

"Oh, of course not, Cecil. I hate a sly girl; and I begin to think you are sly. Do you mean to tell me you don't understand the drift of Hector's attentions to you?"

"But, dear auntie, he is not attentive; at least, not more attentive than a man must be to any woman he meets. Pray do not take any absurd idea into your head. We are almost relations, you know; and we get on very well together—much better than I ever thought we should; but as for any thing more than a cousinly kind of friendship—"

"A cousinly kind of fiddlestick!" cried the

energetic dowager. "Do you think I can believe that all that strolling on the beach, and all that dawdling on the lawn, and all that mumbling by the piano which I hear in my sleep, means nothing but cousinly friendship?"

"On my honour, auntie, Captain Gordon has never said a word to me which the most indifferent acquaintance might not have said."

"Then what in Heaven's name does the man mumble about?" demanded Mrs. MacClaverhouse sharply.

"Oh, we have so much to talk of—our favourite books, and pictures, and music, places we have both seen, old acquaintances, places that he only has seen, and people whom he only has known; and then sometimes we get a little metaphysical—or even mystical. You know how superstitious the Scotch are, and I really think Captain Gordon is almost inclined to believe in the spiritualists."

"That will do. Then Hector Gordon has not made you an offer?"

"No, indeed," Cecil answered, blushing more

deeply than before; "nor have I any reason to suppose he has the faintest idea of doing so. Pray do not mention the subject again, dear aunt. I have such a horror of any thing at all like husband-hunting."

"As you please, my young lady. It's all very well to ride the high horse; but I think some day, when you find yourself unpleasantly close to your thirtieth birthday, and discover some ugly lines under those beautiful hazel eyes of yours—some day when I am dead and gone, and your delicate ivory-white complexion has grown as yellow as an old knife-handle—when you loo forward to a dreary life of dependence upon others, or lonely struggles with a hard, pitiless world—I think then, Lady Cecil, you'll be inclined to regret that you were so contemptuously indifferent to Hector Gordon's merits. There, go and put on your bonnet, child; you may marry whom you please, or remain unmarried as long as you please, for all I care about it. And yet I had built quite a castle in the air about you, and I fancied how nice it would be for you and Hector

to settle in Hyde-Park Gardens, or thereabouts, and for me to live with you. I should like to end my days with my boy; and those second floors in Hyde Park Gardens are very delightful—especially if you are lucky enough to get a corner house."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse's voice seemed to strike like some sharp instrument into Cecil Chudleigh's heart as she concluded this tirade. The girl had listened in proud silence, and retired silently when her aunt came to a pause. An excursion had been planned for the day; the fly was waiting before the gate, and Cecil heard Hector's step pacing to and fro on the gravel-walk below her open window, and smelt the perfume of his cigar as she put on her hat. But all the girlish joyousness with which she had been wont to attire herself for such rustic expeditions had fled from her breast, leaving a heavy dull sense of pain in its stead.

"I daresay aunt MacClaverhouse is right," she thought sadly; "and I shall feel a dreary desolate creature when I come to be thirty, and stand

all alone in the world. But it is so horrible to hear her talk of good matches, just as if every girl must always be on the alert to entrap a rich husband; when I know too that Captain Gordon does not care for me—"

She paused, and a vivid blush stole over her thoughtful face—not the crimson glow of indignation, but the warm brightness which reflects the roseate hue of a happy thought. Did he not care for her? That phrase about "caring for her" is the modest euphemism in which a woman disguises the bold word "love." Was he really so indifferent? Her protest to Mrs. MacClaverhouse had contained no syllable of untruth or prevarication. In all their intercourse, throughout all that cousinly intimacy which had been so sweet a friendship, Hector Gordon had not uttered a word which the vainest or most conscious coquette could construe into a confession of anything warmer than friendship.

"Ah! yet—and yet—and yet!" as Owen Meredith says, there had been something—yes, surely something! no spoken word, no license of

glance, no daring pressure of a yielding hand—something fifty times less palpable, and yet a hundred times sweeter than any of these—a lowering of the voice—a tender tremulous tone now and then, a dreamy softness in the dark-blue eyes—a silence more eloquent than words—a sudden break in a sentence, that had a deeper meaning than a hundred sentences.

"Poor auntie!" thought Lady Cecil, "it was silly of me to be so angry with her; for, after all, I think he does care for me—a little."

Did she think of the contractor's wealth, or remember how high above poverty and dependence she would be lifted by a marriage with Hector Gordon? Did any vision of the corner house in Hyde-Park Gardens, the noble windows overlooking the woods and waters of Kensington, the elegant equipage and thorough-bred horses, arise before her side by side with the image of the young soldier? No. Through that most terrible of ordeals—the furnace of genteel poverty—Lady Cecil had passed unscathed. When the remembrance of Hector Gordon's position flashed

upon her presently, all her pride rose in arms against her weakness.

"I would die rather than he should know that I care for him," she thought. "He might think me one of those calculating mercenary girls one reads of."

Thus it was that, when Lady Cecil took her seat in the carriage that day, there was an air of restraint, a cold reserve in her manner, that Hector Gordon had never seen before.

He also was changed. He had thrown away his cigar while Cecil was lingering in her own room, and had gone into the little breakfast-parlour, where his aunt sat with an unread newspaper in her hand, brooding over her niece's folly. She looked up as Hector entered, and began to talk to him. The conversation was a very brief one, and the Captain had little share in it; but when he went back to the garden his face was grave and downcast; and when he handed Cecil into the carriage, she was struck by the gloomy pre-occupation of his manner. Of all the excursions they had enjoyed together, that

excursion was the least agreeable. The September wind was bleak and chilly, penetrating the warmest folds of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's Indian shawl, and tweaking the end of her aristocratic nose. The brown moorlands and bare stubble-fields had a barren look against the cold gray sky; and the Captain, generally as much *aux petits soins* with regard to the two ladies as if he had been the adoring son of the one and the accepted lover of the other, sat in a gloomy reverie, and seemed to arouse himself by an effort whenever he uttered some commonplace remark upon the weather or the scenery. There was very little conversation during dinner; and Captain Gordon made so poor a pretence of eating that the dowager became positively alarmed, and declared that her boy was ill.

"It is no use talking, Hector," she exclaimed, though her nephew had only made a half-articulate murmur to the effect that there was nothing the matter with him. "You eat no fish, and you only helped yourself to a wing of that chicken; and you sent your plate away with that almost

untouched—a very extravagant mode of sending your plate away, I should say, if you were a poor man. You've not been yourself all day, Hector; so I shall insist on your being nursed this evening. You won't take any fruit, I know; for fruit is bilious.—Never mind the dessert to-day, Mowatt," the widow said, addressing her parlour-maid; "and be sure the fruit is kept in a cool dry place till to-morrow," she added *sotto voce*, as she cast a sharply-scrutinising glance upon the dishes of grapes and apricots. The widow insisted that her nephew was ill and tired; and as the Captain seemed oppressed by a kind of languor which made him quite unequal to offer any opposition to such an energetic person as his aunt, he gave way, and suffered himself to be installed in a reclining attitude on the most comfortable sofa, with an Indian shawl spread over him like the counterpane of a state bed.

"And now Cecil shall play us both to sleep," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse, sinking into her own chair.

The piano was as far away from the sofa as

it could be in so small a room; but Cecil heard a faint sigh as she seated herself in the dusk and laid her hands softly on the keys. How many evenings they two had sat side by side in the same dusk, talking in hushed voices! how often she had felt his breath warm amidst her hair as he bent over her while she sang! But to-day he seemed changed all at once, as he might have changed on the discovery that the woman in whose companionship he had been so unrestrainedly happy was only a scheming coquette after all, and had been spreading an airy net in which to entrap his heart and his fortune. The thought that some chance word of the dowager's might have inspired him with such an idea of her was absolute torture to Cecil Chudleigh.

She felt half inclined to refuse to play or sing for the Captain's gratification; and yet to do so might be to make a kind of scene which would seem only a part of her scheme. So after sitting silently for some minutes she touched the keys softly, and began a little reverie of Kalkbrenner's; the simplest of melodies, with a flowing movement

like the monotonous plashing of waves rising and falling under the keel of a boat; and then she wandered into a very sweet arrangement of that exquisite air of Beethoven's, "Those evening bells," a melody which Moore has made more exquisite by words whose mournful beauty has never been surpassed by any lyric in our language.

"Sing the song, Lady Cecil," said Hector, in a low pleading voice. "Let me hear you sing once more."

There was something in his entreating tone—something that seemed like humility, and which reassured Cecil as to his opinion of her. It was not in such a tone that a man would address a woman he had newly learned to despise. If Hector Gordon had been the suppliant of a queen his accent could have been no more reverential than it was.

"I am in a very melancholy mood to-night, Lady Cecil," he said, while she paused with her hands straying listlessly over the keys; "and I have a fancy for pensive music. Please let me have the song."

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"Do you really wish it?"

"Really—and truly."

What common words they were! and yet how thrilling an accent they took to-night upon *his* lips!

Cecil sang the tender melancholy words in a voice that conveyed all their tenderness—she sang that ballad which in the quiet twilight has so sad a cadence, mournful as the dirge of perished hopes and buried loves. If her low tremulous voice did not break into tears before the end of the song, it was only because, in her nervous terror of any thing like a scene, she exerted all the force of her will to sustain her tones to the close.

She paused when the song was finished, expecting some acknowledgment from Captain Gordon; but the silence of the darkening room was only broken by the slumberous breathing of Mrs. MacClaverhouse. It was a little ungracious of him to utter no word of thanks, Cecil thought; and then she began to wonder about the cause of his melancholy of this evening, and the subject of that moody reverie which had occupied him all day.

While she was wondering about this, the servant came into the room, bearing a tea-tray and a monster moderator lamp, that towered like an obelisk in the centre of the little table on which the dowager was wont to make tea. That lady was startled from her slumbers by the faint jingling of the teacups, and looked about her as sharply as if she had never been asleep at all.

"How quiet you have both been!" she exclaimed, rather impatiently. "I don't enjoy my nap half so much without the drowsy hum of your voices. What droning thing was that you were singing just now, Cecil?"

There was no answer. Cecil still bent abstractedly over the piano, touching the notes softly now and then, but making no sound. Hector Gordon lay with his face hidden by his folded arms. The fussy dowager darted across the room and swooped down upon her nephew.

"Hector," she cried, "what in goodness' name has been the matter with you all day? Why, bless my soul, what's this?—the pillow's wet. You've been crying!"

Captain Gordon got up from the sofa and laughed pleasantly at his aunt's scared face.

"It seems very absurd for a man to be nervous or hysterical," he said; "but I have *not* been myself to-day, and Lady Cecil's song quite upset me."

"What, that droning thing?" exclaimed Mrs. MacCláverhouse. "It sounded to *me* like Young's *Night-Thoughts* set to music."

"I think I'll wish you good night, auntie," said the soldier.

Cecil wondered whether it was the glare of the moderator lamp that made him look so pale as he bent over his aunt.

"I think you'd better," answered the dowager; "and if you're not yourself to-night, I only hope you will be yourself to-morrow. I haven't common patience with such nonsense."

"Good-night, Lady Cecil."

He paused by the piano to say this, but he did not offer Cecil his hand as he had been wont to do at parting, and he left the room without another word.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE AND DUTY.

THE Captain did not appear at the breakfast-table next morning, and it was some time after breakfast when he came into the drawing-room where Cecil sat alone writing letters. He entered through one of the open windows.

"I have been exploring our favourite hills, Lady Cecil," he said; "I hope you did not wait breakfast for me?"

"No; auntie never waits for any one. Shall I order fresh tea or coffee to be made for you?"

"No, thanks; I have no appetite for breakfast this morning."

Cecil went on writing.

"I hope you are better to-day," she said presently, the rapid pen still gliding over the paper, the graceful head still bending over the desk.

There is nothing so charming as the air of indifference with which a woman inquires about the health of the man she loves; but the indifference is generally a little overdone.

"I was not ill yesterday," answered Hector. "There are some things more painful to endure than illness. Lady Cecil, will you do me a favour? I want your advice about a friend of mine, who finds himself in one of the most cruel positions that ever a man was placed in. Are those letters very important?"

"Not at all important."

"In that case I may ask you to put on your hat and come with me for a stroll—you have no idea how lovely the sea looks this morning—and you can give me your advice about my friend."

"I don't think I have had enough experience of life to be a good adviser."

"But you are a lady, and you have a lady's subtle instincts where honour is at stake; and this is a case in which experience of life is not wanted."

Cecil put aside her writing materials and took

her hat from the sofa, where it had been lying. They went out together silently, and walked silently towards the water's edge. The wavelets curled crisply in the fresh autumn breeze, and the sunlit sea rippled as gaily as if the blue waters had bounded beneath the dancing tread of invisible sea-nymphs.

"I shall think of this cool, fresh English seashore very often when I am in Bengal," Hector said.

"You will go back to Bengal—soon?"

"Yes, I think very soon. My leave does not expire for some months; but as I came home on a doctor's certificate, and as the sea-air I got between Calcutta and Suez set me up before I reached home, I have no excuse for remaining away from my regiment much longer. I shall be glad to see all the dear old fellows again;—and—and—a man is always happiest when he is doing his duty."

"You speak as if you knew what it was to be unhappy," said Cecil; "and yet you must remember telling us, one day when you first came

here, that you had never known any serious sorrow in your life."

"Did I say so? Ah! but then that was so long ago."

"So long ago! about five weeks, I believe."

"Five æons! a lifetime at the very least. I have been reading Tennyson on the hills this morning. What a wonderful poet he is! and how much more wonderful as a philosopher! I scarcely regret my forgotten Greek as I read him. To my mind he is the greatest teacher and preacher of our age,—stern and harsh, bitter and cruel sometimes, but always striking home to the very root of truth with an unerring aim. I grow better, and braver, and stronger as I read him. He is not an eloquent wailer of his own woes, like Byron—ah, don't think that I underrate Byron because he is out of fashion; for amidst all the birds that ever sang in the bushes of Parnassus, there is no note so sweet as his to my ear;—and yet Alfred Tennyson has set the stamp of his own suffering on every page of his poetry. Don't talk to me about inner consciousness—or mental imi-

tation. A man must have suffered before he could write 'Locksley Hall;' a man must have been tempted and must have triumphed before he could write 'Love and Duty.' Do you know the poem, Lady Cecil? It is only two or three pages of blank verse; but I have read it half a dozen times this morning, and it seems to me as true as if it had been written with the heart's blood of a brave man. Shall I read it to you?"

"If you please."

Upon that solitary coast they had no fear of interruption. On one side of them lay stubble-fields and low flat meadows, where the cattle stood to watch them as they passed; on the other, the cool gray sea. The autumn sunshine had faded a little, and there were clouds gathering on the horizon—clouds that Hector and Cecil were too pre-occupied to observe. The faint hum of the village died away behind them as they strolled slowly onward. In a desert they could scarcely have been less restrained by any fear of interruption.

Hector Gordon read the poem—in a low, ear-

nest voice—in tones whose deep feeling was entirely free from exaggeration. He read very slowly when he came to the last paragraph of the fragment:

> "Should my shadow cross thy thoughts
> Too sadly for their peace, remand it thou
> For calmer hours to memory's darkest hold,
> If not to be forgotten—not at once—
> Not all forgotten."

He closed the book abruptly with these words, and for some minutes walked on in silence. This time it was Cecil who was ungracious, since she did not thank her companion for reading the poem.

"And now, Lady Cecil, I will tell you my friend's story," said Captain Gordon presently. "It is a common story enough, perhaps; for I suppose there are few lives in which there does not arise the necessity for some great sacrifice."

He paused once more, and then began again, with an evident effort:

"As my life for the last few years has been spent in India among my brother officers, I need scarcely tell you that the man of whom I speak is

an officer. He is, like myself, the son of a rich man; and his military career has been unusually successful. When he joined his regiment he was one of the most thoughtless and impulsive fellows in the universe. He had been spoiled by indulgent friends, and had never in his life had occasion to think for himself. You may bring up a lad in a garden of roses to be a very well-mannered, agreeable fellow, I daresay; but I doubt if the rose-garden education will ever make a great or a wise man. That sort of animal must be reared upon the moorlands, amidst the free winds of heaven. As my friend was thoughtless and impulsive, it was scarcely strange that, when he found himself so idle as to want amusement, he should join in the first tiger-hunt that took place in his neighbourhood, nor was it strange that he should contrive to get seriously wounded by the animal. The wonder was that he escaped alive. He owed the life which his own reckless folly had hazarded to the cool daring of a friend and comrade; and when he woke from the swoon into which he had fallen immediately after feeling the

tiger's claws planted in his thigh, he found himself in the coolest and shadiest room of his friend's house in Calcutta. He still felt the tiger's claws; but it was pleasant to know that the sensation was only imaginary, and that the animal had been shot through the head by the brave young civilian—for his friend was a civilian, and a resident in Calcutta. He had just enough sense to murmur some inarticulate expression of gratitude—just enough strength to grasp his preserver's honest hand; and then he grew delirious from the pain of his wounds, and then he had fever, and altogether a very hard time of it.

"I think you can guess what is coming now, Lady Cecil. In all the history of the world there never surely was the record of man's sorrow or sickness that was not linked with a story of woman's devotion. When my friend was well enough to know what tender nursing was, he knew that the hands which had administered his medicine and smoothed his pillow from the first hour of his delirium belonged to the civilian's sister; a girl whom he had known only as the

best waltzer in Calcutta, but whom he had reason to know now as an angel of pity and tenderness.

"Her attendance upon him was as quiet and unobtrusive as it was watchful and untiring; and on the day on which his medical attendants pronounced him out of danger, she left his room, after a few half-tearful words of congratulation, never to enter it again. But she had watched by him long enough to give him ample time for watching her, and he fancied that he had reason to believe he was beloved for the first time in his life.

"When he was well enough to leave his room he found that she had left Calcutta for a visit to some friends at Simlah. She wanted change of air, her brother said, and it might be some months before she would return. My friend's impulsive nature would not suffer him to wait so long. How base a scoundrel he must have been if his heart had not overflowed with gratitude to the friend who had saved his life, the tender-hearted girl who had watched him in his danger! You

will not wonder when I tell you that his first impulse was to ask his friend to become his brother, his gentle nurse to take the sacred name of wife. What return could he offer for so much devotion, except the devotion of his own life? And his heart was so free, Lady Cecil, that he offered it as freely as if it had been a handful of gold which he had no need of. The civilian acted nobly, declining to accept any pledge in his sister's name. I say nobly, because the soldier was a richer man by twenty times than his friend, and had been the first prize in the Anglo-Indian matrimonial market. The soldier waited only till he was strong enough to bear the jolting of a palanquin before he went to Simlah. He found his nurse looking pale and anxious; little improved by change of air or scene. He came upon her unexpectedly; and the one look which he saw in her face, as she recognised him, assured him that he had not made the senseless blunder of a coxcomb when he had fancied himself beloved. He stayed in the hill country for a fortnight, and he went back to his regiment the promised husband of as pure and

true-hearted a woman as ever lived. I bear tribute to her goodness, Lady Cecil, standing by your side, here upon this English shore, so many hundred miles away. God bless her!"

He lifted his hat as he pronounced the blessing; and looking at him with sad, earnest eyes, Cecil saw that his were dim with tears.

"Oh, Cecil, Cecil!" he said, "I haven't finished my story yet. Can you guess what happened when the soldier came home, and chance threw him into intimate association with another woman? Unhappily, it is such an old story. Ah! then, and then only, his heart throbbed into sudden life. Ah! then only he found how wide a difference there is between a grateful impulse of the mind and an absorbing passion of the heart. Careless and inconsiderate in all things, he abandoned himself to the charm of an association whose peril he never calculated; and he awoke one day, like a man who had been dreaming pleasant dreams upon the edge of a precipice, to discover his danger. I cannot tell you how bitter that awakening was. There is an old Greek fancy

—too foolish for me to tell you—which explains a perfect love as the reunion of two beings who at first were one, but who, separated by an angry deity, have wandered blindly through the universe in search of one another. But sometimes it happens, Lady Cecil, that the half-soul finds its other half too late!

"I have told you my friend's story. How dearly he loves the lady it was his sorrow to know and love too late, I can find no words to tell you. He is a soldier, and he calls himself a man of honour; but he is so weak and helpless in his misery that he has need of counsel from a mind less troubled than his own. He is willing to do his duty, if he can be told wherein his duty lies. Should he write to his betrothed, and confess the truth, trusting in her generosity to set him free? —I am sure she would do so."

There was a brief pause before Cecil said,—

"I am sure of it too, though I do not know her. But do you think she would ever be happy again?"

"I cannot answer for that. Ah, Lady Cecil, I know what you think my friend's duty is."

"There can be no question about it. He must keep his promise," she answered firmly.

"Even if in so doing he forfeits the happiness of his future life; if in so doing he ties himself for ever and ever to the dull wheel of duty; even if he dares to think that his love is not altogether unreturned by her he loves so truly and so hopelessly? Oh, Cecil, be merciful! Remember it is the fate of a lifetime you are deciding."

"I cannot advise your friend to be false to his word," replied Cecil. "I am sorry for his sorrow. But it is a noble thing to do one's duty. I think he will be happier in the end if he keeps his promise."

She looked up at him with a bright, brave glance as she spoke. Their eyes met, and her face changed, in spite of the heroic effort she made to preserve its exalted tranquillity. They stood alone on the narrow sands, with a mournful wind moaning past them, a drizzling rain drifting in their faces, as unconscious of any change in the weather as they were unconscious of all things in the universe—except each other.

"I am going back to London by the mail to-night, Lady Cecil. We shall be together for the rest of the day, I hope,—my last day; but we are not likely to be alone again, and I should like to say good-bye to you here."

He lifted his hat, and the wind and rain drifted his hair away from his face.

"Cecil, I am going back to India, to do my duty, with God's help. Say, God bless you, Hector, and good-bye."

"God bless you, Hector, and—"

She looked up at the perfect face, the dark blue eyes, so dim with tears, and could not finish the sentence. She turned from her companion with a passionate gesture, ashamed of her own weakness, and walked homewards rapidly, with Hector walking silently by her side.

They did not speak until they came to the idle boats, lying keel upwards on the beach, which marked the beginning of the village, and then Captain Gordon broke the silence by a remark which proved that he had only that moment discovered the change in the weather.

"If you'll stop under shelter of that yacht, Lady Cecil," he said, "I'll run on and get a shawl and umbrella."

"Thank you—no—on no account. I don't mind the rain—and we are so near home," answered Cecil, whose flimsy muslin garments were dripping wet.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE FOUNTAINS.

HECTOR GORDON kept his word. He left Fortinbras by the evening train, in despite of his aunt's lamentations, and in despite of something which pierced his heart more cruelly than the lamentations of all the fussy dowagers in Christendom,—the still white look of sorrowful resignation in Cecil Chudleigh's face.

She loved him. He knew the truth and depth of her affection as well as he knew the truth and depth of his own. Love would be a poor divinity indeed, if, as some counterbalance to his physical blindness, he were not gifted with the power of second-sight. Hector needed no word from Cecil to tell him how much he resigned in doing his duty. The hour that had revealed to him the

secret of his own heart had laid bare the mystery of hers. That subtle sympathy, which had seemed so sweet a friendship, had been only love in disguise, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the serpent in the semblance of a dove.

Ah, what utter despair possessed those two sad hearts on that chill September afternoon! what a cold, dreary future lay before those two helpless wanderers, doomed to bid each other farewell! The day might come, as it comes so often in the story of a lifetime, when to look back upon all this trouble and anguish would be to look back upon something as flimsy as a dream. But then what is more terrible than the agony of a dream? —ay, even though in the sleeper's breast there lurk a vague consciousness that he is only the fool of a vision. Brooding over his hopeless sorrow, as the express whirled Londonwards through the darkness, Hector Gordon thought of the stories of unhappy attachments and wasted devotion which he had heard told by his seniors over the mess-table, when the wine went round silently in the summer dusk, and men, whose faces were in sha-

dow, talked more freely than was their wont in the broad glare of day.

"Shall I ever come to tell the story of my sorrow to my brother officers in the gloaming? Will the memory of to-night ever be a subject for friendly talk after a ponderous dinner, while the sentry's tramp echoes in the stillness; and the odour of cigar-smoke floats in from the balcony where the youngsters are lounging? Will they ever call me a dreary old bore, and try to change the subject when they find the conversation drifting round to my dismal love-story? Ah, how sad to be old and a nuisance, and to have profaned the sanctity of my idol's temple!"

How sad to be old! Hector thought of the dull life of duty, the joyless, sunless, desert waste that lay between him and the time when he might begin to care for comet port, and dilate with an elderly dandy's fatuity on the tender story of his youth. He thought of his future until he began to fancy how blessed a thing it would be if his life could end that night in the chill darkness. The engine had but to swerve a hair's-breadth, as

it flew along the top of a steep embankment—and lo the end of all his sorrows! A crash, a sudden agony perhaps—unimaginable in its infinity of pain, but brief as summer lightning,—and the enigma of his existence would be solved, the troublesome thread of his life dissevered.

"My poor Mary would be sorry for me," he thought, remembering the gentle betrothed waiting for him in India; "but she would fancy that I had died adoring her, and in a twelvemonth the memory of me would be a painless sorrow. Shall I make her happy by doing my duty? I have seen ruined men, whose ruin began on the day in which they sacrificed feeling on the shrine of honour. My Cecil, my Cecil, how could you be so cruel as to drive me away from you?"

The image of the pale, sorrowful face that had looked at him with such heroic calmness in the moment of parting arose before him now like a reproach. He knew that she had been right. He knew that her voice had been the voice of truth and honour, the voice of his own conscience. "God help me to be worthy of the love

that never can be mine, and of the gentle darling I am bound to shelter!" he thought. And then a spirit of resignation seemed to exorcise the demon despair, and he took from his pocket-book a letter written on foreign paper,—a letter in a pretty womanly hand, not too easy to decipher,—a letter from his betrothed wife, which he had read hurriedly the day before, too cruelly pre-occupied to know what he was reading.

The tender, trusting words were the most bitter reproaches that could assail him. His heart melted as he read the long, loving epistle by the uncertain light of the railway lamp. He could hear the voice, as he deciphered those simple, girlish sentences. He could see her face—not beautiful, but very sweet and loving.

He was quite alone in the carriage, and when he had replaced the letter in his pocket-book, he detached a little trinket that hung to his watch-chain, and pressed the crystal face of it to his lips. Under the crystal there was a lock of pale flaxen hair, which his own hands had selected for the shears the day he parted from his love at Simlah.

"Poor Mary!" he murmured softly; "poor Mary! it will be something at least to make you happy."

The dowager took her nephew's departure very deeply to heart; or it may be rather that she had set her heart on a suite of spacious apartments in Tyburnia, and was by no means disposed to return to Dorset Square. She questioned Cecil very sharply about Hector's proceedings, and succeeded in driving that young lady into a conversational corner, whence it was impossible to emerge without a revelation of the truth.

"You tell me you think he's engaged," said the dowager, impatiently, after forcing Cecil to admit so much. "And why do you think he's engaged? Did he tell you so?"

"He gave me to understand as much."

"And engaged to whom, pray?"

"A young lady in India."

"A young lady in India. Is that all you know about her?"

"Yes indeed, auntie."

"A nice designing thing, I daresay, and a

nobody into the bargain, or of course he'd have told you who she was," cried Mrs. MacClaverhouse indignantly. "A stuck-up creature, who will contrive to keep her husband at a distance from his relations, no doubt, in order that she may surround him with a pack of harpies of her own kith and kin. And to think that my boy should never have so much as asked my advice before he threw himself away! If you knew how I had built upon you and Hector making a match of it, Cecil, you'd sympathise with my disappointment a little, instead of sitting looking at me in that provokingly placid way of yours. I could have ended my days happily under Hector's roof; I hoped he would have been glad to give his poor old aunt a home; and I don't think you'd have refused me a shelter in my old age—eh, Cecil?"

"Oh, auntie! auntie!"

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had no need to complain of want of sympathy this time, for Cecil suddenly fell upon her knees, and buried her face in her aunt's ample silken skirts, sobbing passionately. The thought of what might have been was so

very bitter; and every word the dowager uttered sent the arrow deeper into the wounded heart.

"Oh, auntie!" she cried, "never speak to me about him again. Oh, pray, pray do not speak of him again! I love him so dearly, so dearly, so dearly!"

It was the first and last passionate cry of Cecil Chudleigh's heart, and it quite melted the dowager: but there was a touch of sternness mingled with her emotion.

"I hope that designing minx will live to repent her artfulness," she said, spitefully; for it is the peculiar attribute of a woman to empty the vials of her wrath on the passive and unconscious maiden for whose sake her plans have been frustrated, rather than on the active masculine offender who has frustrated them.

The dowager and her niece went back to Dorset Square very soon after Hector's departure: and then came visits to country houses;—a fortnight in Leicestershire, where poor Cecil had to endure the hunting talk of horsey men and fast young ladies, the perpetual discussions about dogs and horses and southerly winds and cloudy skies;

a month in an old Yorkshire grange, where there was a cheerful Christmas gathering, and where Lady Cecil had to act in charades and take part in duets—the dear old duets in which *his* melodious barytone had been so delicious. She looked round sometimes when she was singing, and almost expected to see his ghost standing behind her,—so cruel a profanation did it seem to sing the old familiar words. In all the morning gossip, and billiard-playing, and fancy-work, the reading aloud—often from the very books which *he* had read at Fortinbras—in all the music and dancing, the impromptu charades, and carefully studied *tableaux vivants* which enlivened the winter evenings, Cecil had to take her part with a smiling face. She wondered sometimes whether there were any other bright smiles which were only masks assumed for the evening with the evening dress. She wondered whether there was any other woman in all the crowd who saw athwart the lights and exotics of the dinner-table the vision of one dear face whose reality was thousands of miles away.

"He may be lying dead while I sit simpering here," she thought. "Yet that would be too dreadful. Oh! surely, surely I should know it if he were dead!"

Bravely though she bore her burden, it was a very heavy one. No mother, pining in the absence of her only son, could have felt more poignant anxiety about the absent one than Cecil felt for the man who had loved her and left her to marry another woman. How often—ah, how often, amidst the hum of joyous voices, and the brilliant tones of a piano vibrating under masterly hands—how often the lamplight faded, and the faces of the crowd melted away, and the gorgeous drawing-room changed itself into that weedy shore at the foot of grim Fortinbras Castle, while the autumn rain drifted once more into Cecil Chudleigh's face, and *his* eyes looked down upon her dim with tears! Of all their gay and happy hours, their pleasant rambles, Cecil recalled no picture so vivid as that of her lover, in his sorrow, standing bareheaded in the drifting rain, looking tenderly down upon her with fond despairing

eyes. And he was gone from her for ever; never, never, never, so long as she lived, was she to look upon his face again.

But she endured her life, and by and by, when cold gleams of February sunshine lighted the gray sky, the dowager carried her niece back to Dorset Square, and all the old, sordid, wearisome care about forks, spoons, and broken wine-glasses and incorrect butcher's bills began again.

But even broken wine-glasses may be a distraction, and a young lady who has tradesmen's books and the contents of china closets to employ her mind suffers less than the damsel who has nothing to do but to sit by her casement, watching the slow changes of the heavens, and thinking of the absent one. Industrious Charlotte, cutting bread and butter for the little ones, is not so apt to fall in love with Werter as he is to be inspired by a fatal passion for her, since, paltry and sordid a task as Charlotte's may be, it yet requires some thought, or the lady will cut her fingers. A little wholesome household work would have saved poor Elaine from many of those long hours of brood-

ing, in which the lily maid of Astolat contemplated the dark knight's image. Work, the primeval curse, may have been a blessing in disguise after all.

Lady Cecil bore her life. She went hither and thither to places in which she felt little interest, amongst people whose companionship seemed so poor a substitute for that brief, sweet friendship of the departed autumn. Ah, what could ever bring back to her heart the thrilling joy of that broken dream?

Yet her life was not altogether joyless. It was only the magical, mystical gladness, the delight too deep for words, which had gone out of her existence for ever in the hour of that irrevocable parting on the wet sea-shore. She had friends and companions, a social status, in right of her father's name and race, even amongst the vulgar who knew that she was only a penniless dependent upon the sharp-spoken dowager. Perhaps the friend with whom Cecil Chudleigh's proud reserve was most often wont to melt into tender sympathy was Florence Crawford, the fri-

volous divinity at whose shrine the young landscape-painter had laid his heart and his ambition.

They had met "in society," as Flo said, with a little air, which implied that the only society in the civilised world was the circle wherein Miss Crawford revolved: and they had taken a fancy to each other, according to Florence, though it must be confessed the fancy had been chiefly on her own side, as Cecil was not prone to sudden friendships.

"But there was some one else took a fancy to you before I did," exclaimed Flo. "There's not the least occasion to blush, Lady Cecil, for the some one else was only a middle-aged man, with such a shelf on his dear old back that I sometimes quite long to set a row of Carl-Theodore tea-cups on his coat-collar for ornamentation. It was papa who took a fancy to you. He's the most absurd old thing in the world, and he says yours is the very face he has been waiting for, for his new picture. He is going to paint the prison scene in *Faust*, and he declares that you have the exact expression he wants for his Gret-

chen. You have no idea what trouble he will take to get a sitting from any one whose face has fascinated him. Professional models are all very well, but you can't get a professional model to read Goethe, or to imagine that she sees an infant struggling in the water, for a shilling an hour. What papa wants is expression, and he was struck by your face the other night when you were singing at Lady Jacynt's; there was an exalted look about your eyes and forehead, he said, which would be worth a fortune to him; so I am to exert all my fascinations in order to induce you to give him a sitting or two; and I'm sure you will, won't you, Lady Cecil? for he really is a dear good creature."

Cecil assented very readily, flattered and honoured by the painter's request. She was a far more reverent disciple of art than Florence Crawford, who spoke flippantly of the greatest master of his age as a dear old thing, and was wont to frisk hither and thither in her father's painting-room, criticising his pictures as freely as if they had been so many Parisian bonnets.

It would have been very strange if Cecil had not been glad to exchange the sordid atmosphere of Dorset Square for the dreamy splendour of the Fountains. The hour or two which Mr. Crawford had entreated in the first place grew into many hours, and Cecil had spent half-a-dozen pleasant mornings in the great master's painting-room before the vague shadow which was so unintelligible to common eyes grew out of the canvas, and became a woman, instinct with life and soul. Flo brought her box of water-colours on these occasions, and perched herself at a little table in a corner of the spacious chamber; for she made a faint show of devotion to art now and then as an excuse for intruding into the painter's sanctum. What place of retreat could be sacred from an only daughter, and such an only daughter as Florence Crawford?

So the young lady came very often to the noble tapestried painting-room, into which half the contents of Mr. Woodgate's shop seemed to have been imported, so rich was the gorgeous chamber in black oak cabinets and stamped-lea-

ther-cushioned chairs, coloured marbles and mediæval armour, majolica vases and Venetian glass. The painter loved beautiful things, and spent his money as recklessly as Aladdin or Alexandre Dumas. For how was it possible that a man could be careful of vulgar pounds and shillings under whose magic-working hand human grandeur and human beauty developed into being—who knew but two rivals, Rubens and Nature—and who could afford to stand comparison with the first?

William Crawford was a painter in the highest and grandest sense of the word; and he wasted his money and sold his pictures for a song when the whim seized him, and scattered little water-colour bits in the scrap-books of beautiful high-born feminine mendicants, which, collected together, would have realised a small fortune at Christie's. It was only when judicious friends with business habits stepped in and insisted upon negotiating affairs for the great painter, that Mr. Crawford received large prices for his pictures, and found a satisfactory row of pencil figures under

the last pen-and-ink entry in his banking-book. The story of the painter's youth and manhood was not without a touch of sadness. It was the old, old story of a brilliant career and a broken life. William Crawford had not sprung into Fame's ample lap with one daring bound. His progress had been slow and laborious, and there had been a few silver threads mingled with his auburn hair before the laurel crown descended on his forehead, or the nimbus of glory made a light about his earnest face. He had seen other men pass him by—his companions of the Academy, the students who had sat by his side,—he had seen them go by him to take their places amongst the victors, great men in their way, most of them; but how weak and puny was the greatest compared to him!

He had so much to endure, and he bore it all so meekly! So patient was he in the sublime resignation of conscious genius, which knows that it *must* triumph,—that he grew by and by to be set down as a dull, plodding fellow, who would never do any thing worth looking at. Year after

year—year after year—his pictures came back upon him from the Academy, from the British Institution, rejected! rejected! rejected! Yet he was William Crawford all the time, and knew himself, and the sovereign power of his hand.

Meek and mighty spirit to wait so long, to labour so patiently, hoarding thy strength, and adding to thy power day by day, as a miser swells his pile of vulgar gold!

The day came at last, but not all at once. Pictures were accepted, and "skyed:" critics talked about coldness, and blackness, and chalkiness: friends were compassionate, and shoulders were shrugged with polite despair. The poor man had really no idea of colour!

For a few years things went on like this, and then appeared a gorgeous Rubens-like canvas, whereon Pericles reclined at the feet of Aspasia: and in a day, in an hour, the mighty master of all the secrets of colour revealed himself, and the world knew that William Crawford was a great painter.

After that day the men who had called Craw-

ford, a dull, plodding fellow, offered him monstrous bribes for the revelation of his "secret." He smiled at their ignorance. He had no secret except his genius. His mystic cabala lay in the two virtues that had made the law of his life—unremitting industry, undeviating temperance. In the chill early light of morning, in the warm glow of noon, in the deepening shadows of evening, in the artificial light of the night school at the Academy, William Crawford had toiled for twenty years, finding no drudgery too hard, no monotonous repetition of study too wearisome. And now, at eight-and-thirty, he found himself a great man, and he knew that his hand was to be trusted, and that his feet were surely planted on the mountain he had climbed so patiently.

Alas, there are so many blessings in this life that come too late! many a vessel laden with the gold of Ophir only nears the shore when her owner lies dead upon the sands. When William Crawford tasted the first fruits of success, the wife—to purchase whose happiness he would have sold his heart's blood—had been dead ten years.

She had felt the cruel hand of poverty, and had withered under that bitter grip; but she had never complained. She had borne all meekly for his sake—for his sake.

Now, when people offered him large prices for his pictures, he felt half inclined to refuse their commissions in utter bitterness of heart.

"You should have bought my 'Pyramus and Thisbe' twelve years ago," he would have cried. "A fifty-pound check would have done that for me then which all the kings and princes of this earth could not do now. It would have brought a smile to the face of my wife."

The young wife whose death had left such a terrible void in the painter's heart had been of higher rank than himself, and had run away from a luxurious home to inhabit draughty second-floor lodgings in a street running out of the Strand. William Crawford had trusted in the strength of his hand to win a better home for his darling. But the blackest years of his life were those that immediately succeeded his marriage, and the poor loving girl had to suffer deprivations that were

unfelt by the Spartan painter, but which fell heavily on the home-bred damsel who had sacrificed so much for him. She would have held the loss of position a very light one; but she found that she had lost all her home-friends as well, for her father shut his door upon her after her marriage, and she had no mother to plead for her at home, or to visit her by stealth in her husband's shabby dwelling. The father was a hard, obstinate man, who plucked his daughter's image out of his heart as coolly as he erased her name from his will. He begged that Mrs. Crawford might never be mentioned in his presence; and he threatened to horsewhip the painter in the rooms of the Royal Academy if ever he met him there.

Whether he relented suddenly when the young wife died, or whether his conscience had given him some uneasiness from the beginning, no one ever knew; but he wrote a civil letter to the widower, declaring his willingness to adopt and educate the little girl his daughter had left behind her.

There was some hesitation, a little parley as to how often the father should be permitted to see his child; a very manly letter from the painter, setting forth the condition on which he was willing to part with the little girl, that condition being neither more nor less than an understanding that she was *his* child, and his only, committed as a sacred trust to her mother's family, and to be claimed by him at any hour he pleased. And then he let his little Florence go. A year later he would as soon have plucked the heart out of his breast as he would have parted from her; but at this time he was utterly broken down in body and mind—so crushed, so desolate, that it seemed as if nothing could add to his desolation. He was even glad to get rid of the child. The sound of her young voice saddened him. There were tones in it that were like her mother's.

"I sat in my room and painted," he said afterwards, when he was able to talk of this dreadful time, "but I didn't know what I was painting, or whether it was winter or summer. People would come in and sit down and talk to me—they

came to cheer me up a little, they said. I talked to them and answered them; and when they went away I didn't know who they were, or what they had been talking about. As for my work, the right colours came on my brush somehow; but when the faces looked out at me from my canvas, I used to wonder who had painted them, and what they meant. I don't know how long that time lasted. I only know that the best and dearest friend I ever had took me across the Channel with him, and on to Italy; and one morning, after landing at some place from a steamer in the darkness, I opened my window and saw the Bay of Naples before me. I burst into tears, for the first time since my wife's death; and after that I learnt to bear my sorrow patiently."

When William Crawford found himself a successful man, he built himself a house at Kensington from a design of his own. After stating which latter fact, it is quite unnecessary to say that the Italian façade was perfection, that the Alhambra-like colonnade at the back was delicious, that there was a great deal of space wasted

in unnecessary passages, and that there was neither a housemaid's closet nor a dust-bin in the original plan of the mansion. But then what a charming spot was that on which Mr. Crawford planted his temple! for he was far too wise a man to erect his dwelling on one of those patches of arid waste which are called desirable building-ground. He had discovered an inconvenient old house in a delicious garden between the old Court suburb and Tyburnia, and had carted away the rambling, low-roofed dwelling, and set up his dazzling white temple in its stead. The crowning glory of the place was a pair of marble fountains which the painter had brought from Rome—fountains whose silver waters had made harmonious accompaniment to the voices of revellers in Tivoli fifteen hundred years ago.

It was to this pleasant home that William Crawford brought his beautiful daughter from the fashionable boarding-school in which she had received her education. Her grandfather had died, leaving her the five thousand pounds that had once been allotted to her mother. Her aunts

and uncles were scattered, and not one of them had been able to obtain any lasting hold upon the impulsive little heart which beat in Miss Crawford's breast. She came to the Fountains at her father's bidding, and her pretty caressing ways were very pleasant to him; but she did not fill the void in his heart. He looked in her face very sadly sometimes, for it recalled the vision of another face, with a tender, loving light in the eyes, which was wanting in Flo's flashing glances. She was such a frivolous creature compared with her mother. The difference between them was as wide as the contrast between a tender cooing dove which nestles in your bosom and a beautiful butterfly that flits and skims hither and thither in the sunshine. Miss Crawford was fond of her father, and proud of him after a fashion; but she had no power to appreciate the sublimity of his art, the grandeur of his triumphs. She admired him, and was pleased with his success because it had given him wealth and fashion. Alone in a desert that *other one* would have rejoiced with him in the glory of his work, however unprofitable,

however remote from the possibility of reward, because it was his, and because he loved it.

There were times when Flo's frivolous criticisms jarred on the painter's ear, for there were tones in her voice which even yet reminded him too painfully of the lost one. He was an over-indulgent father, said people, who estimated a father's indulgence by the amount of a daughter's pocket-money; but it may be that he would have been less indulgent if he had loved his child better, or rather if she had been able to reach that inner sanctuary of his soul where the image of the dead reigned alone.

Lady Cecil felt a thrill of delight when the painter turned his easel and revealed his finished picture.

Ah, wonderful power, given to a man in such fulness as it had been given to William Crawford once in two hundred years, rarest of all earthly gifts, the masterdom of colour, the power which makes the painter's hand second only to the hand of the Creator who bade Eve come forth out of

the shadow of night, and revealed to awakening Adam the perfection of womanly loveliness.

In the prison scene the painter had full scope for his wondrous power of colour. The light in the picture was subdued. Only through the open door of poor Gretchen's cell one saw a lurid glimmer of the coming day. In this open doorway lounged Mephistopheles, with a horrible smile upon his face, and his figure darkly defined against that low lurid glimmer. The light of the prison-lamp shone full on the faces of the lovers, and the sickly yellow light made a kind of aureole around Gretchen's golden head.

While Cecil stood before the picture in rapt admiration, Miss Crawford laid down her brushes and came to look at her father's labour. The painter lounged against the wall opposite his easel, gazing dreamily at his completed work.

O butterflies of fashion, driving mail-phaetons or tooling teams of four-in-hand in the Lady's Mile, sybarites and loiterers in pleasant drawing-rooms, loungers in clubs, and triflers with existence, lotus-eaters of every species, have any of

you ever known a joy so deep as this—the joy that drove Pygmalion mad, the intoxicating triumph of the creator who sees his work complete in all its beauty and perfection?

"H'm, yes, it's very pretty," said Flo, after contemplating the picture under the shadow of two pretty jewel-twinkling hands arched over her piquant eyebrows; "but isn't Gretchen's arm a *leetle* out of drawing? I'm sure I could never get *my* arm into that position; but I daresay people's arms were more flexible in those days. How awfully blue you've made Mephistopheles; but I'm very glad you haven't allowed him to cross his legs. *Why* a diabolical person should always cross his legs is a mystery that I have never been able to fathom. It's very nice, papa; but I don't like it so well as 'Pericles and Aspasia.' Your proclivities are classic, you dear old thing, so you had better stick to your Lempriere, and let us have rosy gods and goddesses *ad infinitum*."

"*Ad nauseam*, perhaps," said the painter sadly.

The critics had been very hard upon William Crawford; and there had been people besotted enough to utter the shameful word "sensualism" in connection with the purest and simplest creature who ever worshipped the divinity of beauty. And then there were all the host of funny little writers who wrote facetious little criticisms upon the great man's pictures. His Cupid had the mumps, his Psyche was in the last stage of scarlet fever, his Alcibiades was a butcher's boy, his Timandra a scorbutic shrew, his Boadicea a prize-fighter disguised in female raiment. The funny little writers, who could not have sketched the outline of a pump-handle correctly, had fine fun out of William Crawford. He was happy in spite of all adverse criticism, and had succeeded in spite of his critics. Of course there were some who knew what they were writing about; and to such adverse opinion as he felt to be just William Crawford bowed his head meekly, not too proud to believe that he could have done better if he had "taken more pains." Who could be more acutely conscious than he was of his shortcomings?

Whose eyes were keener than his to perceive the weak spots in his work? There is no finer tonic for the true worker than adverse criticism. The friend's lavish praise may enervate: the foe's hardest usage braces and fortifies. Guy Patin, in a criticism on Sir Thomas Browne, which in the Christian benevolence of its tone is not altogether unlike some criticism of the nineteenth century—regrets that "the man is alive, because he may grow worse." How completely the slashing critics of the present day seem to forget that so long as the man is alive, it is possible for him to grow better!

William Crawford was very happy in the painting-room where the greater part of his life was spent. What man can be so happy as the triumphant artist?—convinced of the innocence and purity of his triumphs, assured of being remembered when all other labourers are forgotten, knowing that his glory will be revealed to posterity by no musty records written by a stranger, but by his own handiwork, instinct with his own soul, revealing himself in a language that needs no translation, and is almost as familiar to the

savage as to the *savant*, so nearly does it copy nature.

Florence thought it a very hard thing that her father would not take her to perpetual parties, and grumbled sorely at being sent under convoy of any grumpy old chaperone who might be available; but on this matter the painter very rarely gave way.

"Do you know how long art is, as compared to a man's life?" he asked. "Can you guess what Raffaelle might have been if he had lived to be as old as Titian? If there is any special strength in my hand, Flo, it is because in twenty years I have worked as hard as most men work in forty. When I paid fifteen shillings a week for my lodgings my landlord grumbled because I kept my fire in all night, in order that I might be at work before daybreak. I don't make any merit of having worked hard, you know, my dear. I have worked because my work pleased me; and you would never believe how little I ever thought of the fame or money that success would bring me. I don't think your real artist ever sets much value

upon the price of his labour; he may want money as much as any other man, and of course he is glad to get it; but it is the triumph of his art that he rejoices in, rather than any personal success. The creation of his work is in itself happiness, and would be though his picture were foredoomed to melt and vanish under his hand at the moment of its completion. I would answer for it that Michael Angelo enjoyed modelling his statue of snow quite as much as if he had been putting the finishing touches of his chisel to the fairest marble that ever grew into life under the craftsman's hand, to receive a soul from the last touch of the master. Don't worry me about parties, Flo. I will pay as many milliners' bills as you like, and I'll paint you in all your prettiest dresses and your most bewitching attitudes, and give you the price of your beauty for pocket-money; but I won't go to be crushed to death upon staircases, or martyred in the act of fetching an ice. I won't go to people who only want to see what the painter of Aspasia is like, as if I must needs be like something different from my fellow-men, and who will

think me an insignificant-looking fellow, with very little to say for myself. What should I have to say to people who don't know the A B C of the language to the study of which I have given my life?"

So Flo was obliged to be satisfied, and was fain to go into society under the wing of benevolent matrons who had no daughters of their own to be crushed by Miss Crawford's beauty. Flo had her maid and her carriage, and was quite a little woman of fashion; while the painter lived his own life, opening his doors every Sunday evening to all who cared to visit him, and generally hiding himself in some snug little corner of his spacious drawing-rooms amongst the friends of his soul, while fashionable visitors, who had been received with perfect *aplomb* by Florence, prowled about in search of him, and stared at the wrong man through gold-rimmed eye-glasses, or pronounced adverse criticisms upon his own pictures under his very nose. Of course Florence Crawford was perfectly aware that her father's *protégé*, the landscape painter, was desperately in

love with her. We live in a fast-going century, and though Flo was only eighteen, she was fully versed in the diagnostics of a hopeless passion of which she was the object. She knew poor Philip's weakness, and laughed undisguisedly at his folly. She was a very dashing young person, and she declared herself to be an utterly heartless young person, whenever she became expansive and confidential. Whether the heartlessness were real or affected was an enigma which no one had yet been able to solve. Whatever were the follies of the age, Flo went with them at full gallop. She talked slang, and affected a masculine contempt for all feminine pursuits, had been heard to ask what bodkins were meant for, and whether shirt-buttons were fastened on their foundations with glue. She had a tiny, tiny morocco volume, lined with satin and emblazoned with gold, and obnoxious with patchouli — a volume that was called a betting-book, and which had about the same relation to the greasy volumes kept by the bookmen who gather on the waste ground in Victoria Road, or meet one another furtively at the

corner of Farringdon Street, as a rosebud has to a red cabbage. Dozens of Jouvin's or Dent's six-and-a-quarter gloves were the principal entries in this mystic volume; but Flo had been known to obtain an actual tip from some aristocratic member of the Jockey Club, by whose friendly agency real money had been wagered and won. She was very fast, and had once been seen under the marble colonnade at the Fountains puffing daintily at a coquettish little cigarette. But it is only fair to add that the daring exploit resulted in deadly pallor and unpleasant faintness, and that the experiment was not repeated. She had her horse, and her own groom;—a steady old fellow who helped in the garden, and of whose boots and costume poor Flo was inclined to be rather ashamed when she met her stylish friends in the Row.

Did she ever pause to think that her life was useless, and extravagant, and unwomanly? Well, no, not yet. She was only eighteen, remember, the age when a woman has not quite ceased to be a kind of refinement upon a kitten—beauti-

ful, graceful, capricious, mischievous, treacherous. She was at an age when a woman is apt to take pleasure in treading on masculine hearts, and if remonstrated with upon her cruelty, would be quite inclined to echo the question of the poetess, and cry,—

> "Why should a heart have been there,
> In the way of a fair woman's foot?"

Flo insisted on making a confidante of Cecil.

"I'm the most mercenary of creatures, you know, dear," she said, "and I made up my mind ever so long ago that I would marry for money, and nothing but money. All the nicest girls marry for money nowadays, and live happy ever afterwards. I daresay there was a time when it was quite nice to be poor, and live in a cottage with the husband of one's choice. What a musty old Minerva Press phrase that is!" cried Flo, with a grimace,—"the husband of one's choice! But that was in the days when women wore cottage-bonnets with a bit of ribbon across the crown, or hideous gipsy hats tied down with handkerchiefs, and white muslin dresses with a

breadth and a half in the skirt, and when a woman on horseback was a show to be followed by street boys. I suppose Lady Godiva and Queen Elizabeth were the only women who ever did ride in the Middle Ages. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* A woman in the present day must have three or four hundred a-year for pin-money, if she is not to be a disgrace to her sex in the way of gloves and bonnets; and she must ride a three-hundred-guinea hack, if she wants to escape being trampled upon by her dearest friends; and she will find herself a perfect outcast unless she has a box in a good position at one of the opera-houses; and she must go in for dogs and china, —not vulgar modern Dresden abominations, in the way of simpering shepherdesses, and creatures in hoops drinking chocolate or playing chess; but old Vienna, or Chelsea, with the gold anchor, or deliciously ugly Wedgwood, or soft paste. In short, my dearest Cecil, a woman nowadays is a very expensive creature, and love in a cottage is an impossibility. Why, there *are* no cottages for the poor lovers! The tiniest, tiniest

villa on the banks of the Thames costs about two hundred a-year; and if the poverty-stricken creatures who marry for love want a house, they must go to some horrible place beyond the Seven Sisters' Road, and be happy amongst a wilderness of brickfields and railway arches!"

Lady Cecil had seen Florence and Philip together, and had taken it into her head that they loved each other. Her own sorrowful love-story had made her very tenderly disposed towards youthful lovers, and she had ventured to remonstrate with Florence.

"One reads about cruel parents and heart-broken damsels, but I don't think your papa would set his face against Mr. Foley so sternly as you set yours, Flory," she said. "He was talking of the young painter the other day, and he told me that your friend Philip has a great career before him if he works patiently."

"Yes, and when he is as old as papa he will be able to earn two or three thousand a-year, I suppose!" exclaimed Miss Crawford. "Do you think that is a brilliant prospect for a girl who

cannot live out of society? People with any thing under five thousand a-year are paupers—in society. Do you know what it is that is bearing down upon us, and crushing us all, Cecil, like an avalanche of gold? It is the wealth of the commercial plutocracy. The triumphant monster, Commerce, is devouring us all. Ask papa who buys his pictures; ask where the gems from Christie's go when the great auctions are over; ask why diamonds are worth twice as much to-day as they were twenty years ago: it is all because the princes of trade have taken possession of our land, Cecil, and nowadays a girl must set her cap in the direction of Manchester, if she wishes to marry well."

"Florence, I can't bear to hear you talk like this."

"I am a woman of the world, dear, and I mean to do the best I can for myself. It is very dreadful, I know, but at least I am candid with you. I went to a fashionable school, and you've no idea how we all worshipped wealth and finery. Papa used to come and see me in horrid old han-

som cabs, that jingled and rattled as if they would have fallen to pieces when he stepped out of them; but some girls had fathers and mothers who came in two-hundred-guinea barouches, and O what a gulf there was between us! And then, again, poor mamma's people live in Russell Square, and there were girls at that school who made me feel that it was a kind of disgrace to have friends in Russell Square. And when I spent the holidays with my uncles and aunts, I used to have mamma's foolish marriage dinned into my ears; and though I always took her part, and declared that it was better to marry papa than to marry a prince of the blood royal, I *did* think, in my secret soul, that it was very silly to go and live in shabby lodgings near the noisy, dirty Strand. Is it any wonder that I have grown up heartless and mercenary, and that I want to have a fine house and horses and carriages when I marry? I hope you will marry a rich man too, Cecil, and give nice parties. You won't have Thursdays though, will you, dear? I have set my heart on having Thursday for my own, own evening."

To this effect Miss Crawford would discourse in her own vivacious fashion; and it was in vain that Cecil appealed to the unawakened heart.

"Philip Foley is a most estimable creature," said Flo; "and if he were not absurdly self-conscious—all young men are so self-conscious nowadays; in fact, in a general way, I consider young men perfectly hateful,—and if he were a marquis with something under a hundred thousand a year, I should think him quite adorable. But then, you see, he isn't a marquis, and he will never earn any thing like a hundred thousand a year by painting those wild skies and dismal rocks of his. Do you know what the Princess Elizabeth, that dear sweet darling whom every one so admires, said when she saw one of Mr. Foley's red-and-yellow sunsets hung next the ceiling in Trafalgar Square:—'Why, what do the Hanging Committee mean by sticking up pictures of eggs and bacon?' said the Princess; and ever since that, the poor young man's skies have been called eggs and bacon."

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDING CARDS.

RETURNING from the Fountains one day after a pleasant morning spent half in the garden, half in Mr. Crawford's painting-room, Cecil found the dowager in one of her worst humours.

"Has any thing annoyed you while I have been away, auntie?" she asked, gently.

"Has any thing annoyed me indeed, auntie!" echoed Mrs. MacClaverhouse, with unusual acrimony. "I begin to think that I was only sent into the world for the purpose of being annoyed. Do you know that the mail from Marseilles comes in to-day, Lady Cecil?"

Cecil's downcast face grew first crimson and then pale. The Indian letters! The very mention of the post that brought them set her heart beating fast and passionately; and she had no

right to be interested in their coming; she had no right to be glad or sorry for any tidings that the Indian mail could bring.

"You have heard from Captain Gordon, I suppose, auntie?" she said, falteringly.

"Yes, I have heard from him," answered the dowager in her most snappish manner.

"I hope he is well?"

"O yes, he is *well* enough, or as well as a man can be who is such a fool as to become the victim of any designing minx who chooses to set her cap at him. What do you think of that enclosure, Lady Cecil?"

The dowager tossed an envelope across the table towards the spot where her niece was standing, downcast and sad. Cecil knew what the enclosure was; yes, a little shiver went through her as she took up the envelope, for she knew only too well what it contained.

A glazed envelope with a crest emblazoned in silver was within the outer covering, and inside the flap of the glazed envelope was inscribed the name of Mary Chesham. Two limp, slippery

cards dropped from Cecil's hand as she read the name of her rival: the name which was hers no longer, for on the larger card appeared the more dignified title of the matron, "Mrs. Hector Gordon."

She put the cards back into the envelope and laid it gently on the table.

"God grant they may be happy!" she murmured softly.

"Yes," answered the dowager; "and we are to live in Dorset Square all our lives, I suppose. Upon my word, Cecil, you are enough to provoke the patience of a saint. You might have married Hector Gordon if you had liked. Yes, child, you might. I watched the man. I've known him since he eat his first top-and-bottom, and I can see him eating it, in my mind's eye, at this very moment; so I think I ought to know his ways. He was over head and ears in love with you; and if it hadn't been for some highflown nonsense of yours he never would have gone back to India to marry that designing minx. He was engaged, forsooth! and if he was, I suppose he could have

disengaged himself! He was in love with you, Cecil, and you know that you might have married him as well as I do. What was he whimpering about that night, I should like to know, when you sang him your doleful songs, if he wasn't in love? No man in his proper senses would moon about all day with two women, reading poetry and listening to doleful songs, unless he was in love. However, I've no doubt some nonsensical scruples of yours sent him back to Calcutta to become the prey of a minx called Chesham. Who *are* the Cheshams, I should like to know? It sounds a decent name enough; but I don't know any Cheshams. Give me the first volume of Burke's *Landed Gentry*, Cecil, and let me see if there are any respectable Cheshams."

Lady Cecil went into an inner room to look for the volume her aunt required. She found herself standing before the bookshelves, looking dreamily at the backs of the books, and wondering what it was she had come to seek. For some few moments she was quite unable to collect her thoughts. Was she sorry that Hector Gordon

had fulfilled his engagement? Ah, no! ah, no, no! To have wished his promise broken would have been to wish him something less than he was.

"O, I am proud to think him good, and honourable, and true," she murmured, in a kind of rapture; "I am proud and glad to think that he has kept his promise."

Ah, reader, can you not imagine that the pale girl in Mr. Millais' picture was in the depths of her soul almost glad that her Huguenot lover refused to have the white scarf tied about his arm? His refusal would cost him his life, perhaps, but O, how proud she must have been of him in that moment of supreme agony!

Lady Cecil carried the volume of Burke to her aunt, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse set herself to discover the antecedents of Mrs. Hector Gordon, *née* Chesham.

"There's a letter from Mrs. Lochiel on the table there," she said, without looking up from her book, "with an account of this fine wedding. You can read it if you like."

The dowager was an inveterate gossip, and

kept up a correspondence with a dozen or two other dowagers, who took a benign interest in all the births, marriages, and deaths that came to pass within their circle. Perhaps if Mrs. MacClaverhouse had not been soured by the bitter disappointment and mortification which had befallen the pleasant castle she had built in Hyde-Park Gardens at her nephew's expense, she might have been a little more merciful to poor Cecil's wounded heart. But it must be remembered that she did not know how deeply the girl's heart was wounded.

Cecil read Mrs. Lochiel's letter. Is it necessary to say that she read every word of that gossiping epistle more than once, though the reading of it gave her exquisite pain? There are poisoned arrows for which some women bare their breasts —there are tortures which some women will suffer unbidden. There never was a woman yet, in Lady Cecil's position, who was not eager to be told what finery her rival wore, and how she looked in the wedding splendour.

Mrs. Lochiel was very discursive on the subject of millinery.

"Dear Mary Chesham looked very *sweet*," she wrote. "She is not pretty, but remarkably *interesting*, fair, with soft blue eyes, and a very *winning* expression. I know you will be pleased with her when Captain Gordon brings her to England, and they *do* say that his regiment will be ordered home next year. I am sure you ought to be proud of such a nephew, for he is one of the most popular young men in Calcutta, and one meets him at all the best houses. Every one says that Mary Chesham has made a wonderful match, and of course there are *some* people who *insinuate* that her brother manœuvred very cleverly to bring about the marriage. But I have met Mr. Chesham, who seems a very superior young man, and not at all the sort of person to manœuvre.

"The wedding was one of the gayest affairs we have had in Calcutta this season. Mary had six bridesmaids, some of the nicest girls in the city; and of course the military and civil service mustered in full force. The bride wore white glacé, made with a high body and short sleeves, and trimmed with bouillonnées of *tulle illusion*, and

a large *tulle* veil, which covered her like a cloud. The dress was very simple, and certainly *inexpensive*, but *quite Parisian* in style. Mary has a very lovely arm,—those pale, insipid girls, with fair hair, generally have lovely arms,—and she wore a *very superb* pearl bracelet, given her by her uncle, Colonel Cudderley, who is, I believe, expected to *leave her money*. So you see your nephew has not done so *very badly* after all, though people here say he might have made a *much better match*. However, I am told that he is quite devoted to Mary, and I'm sure his manner, when I have seen them together, has been *most attentive*."

Lady Cecil laid down the letter. Was this jealousy, this cruel pang which seemed to rend her heart asunder, as she read of her rival's bliss? O, surely not jealousy! Had she not with her own lips bidden him to fulfil his promise? and was she grieved and wounded now to find that he had kept the spirit as well as the letter of that promise? Had she expected that he would marry the girl who loved him, and yet by his cold indifference bear witness that he loved another?

Surely she could never have thought he could be base enough to do that.

"What did I want?" she thought; "what did I expect? I told him to go back to her; and yet my heart aches with a new pain when I hear that he is happy by her side. Could I wish it to be otherwise? Could I wish him any thing but what he is—good, and true, and noble—a loyal lover—a tender husband?"

Alone in her own room, in Dorset Square, Cecil Chudleigh knelt long and late that night, praying for resignation and peace of mind. But even amidst her prayers the face of Hector Gordon, looking down upon her with melancholy tenderness, came between her and her pious aspirations.

"O, I wish that I had never seen him," she cried, passionately; "what a happy thing it would have been for me if I had never seen him!"

The day came when Lady Cecil had need to utter this cry with a wilder meaning; the day came when she had reason to think that she would have been a blessed creature if she had died before Hector Gordon came to Fortinbras.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT O'BOYNEVILLE.

THE dowager was of a lively disposition, and by no means inclined to spend her evenings in the dusky solitude of her drawing-room in Dorset Square, where the departed general's monster mandarin-jars and Oriental cabinets loomed dark and grim in the twilight. In the halls and on the staircases of Tyburnia and Belgravia, in the deliciously-squeezy little drawing-rooms and antechambers of the tortuous byways in May Fair, wherever there was festivity or junketing in which a gentlewoman might share, Mrs. MacClaverhouse and her black silk and diamonds were to be seen. She took Cecil with her every where, and she informed the young lady that it was on her account that the phantom-chariot and the grumpy coachman with doubtful legs and feet were called into service every evening.

It was quite in vain that Cecil remonstrated, declaring that she was happier with her books and piano in the little back drawing-room in Dorset Square than at the most brilliant assemblage of the season. Was she happier at home than abroad, in this sad season, when it seemed to her as if all hope and gladness had utterly vanished out of her life? Was she happier? She employed the word in her remonstrance with her aunt; for she would fain have hidden her wounds from the sharp eyes of that unsentimental protectress. And at home she had at least the liberty of being unhappy. She could sit alone playing *his* favourite music softly to herself in the dusk, while the dowager dozed at ease in the adjoining chamber. In society she felt like a slave crowned with roses, compelled to wear the same company-smile night after night, to affect an interest in the same frivolous subjects, to hold her own amongst brilliant young ladies, who would have laughed her girlish sorrow to scorn could they have penetrated beneath the frozen calm of her manner. The brilliant young ladies declared that Cecil Chud-

leigh was proud. "The Aspendell Chudleighs always have been poor and proud," it was said. There were faster spirits who called her "slow," and who were pleased to ridicule the black robes of the dowager and the pale face and white-muslin draperies of her niece.

And in the mean time Cecil went wherever the dowager chose to drag her, with an uncomplaining patience which might have won for her the crown of martyrdom, if there were any crowns for the martyrs of every-day life. The slow season dragged itself out. Ah, how long and how slow it seemed to Cecil Chudleigh, while she heard so many voices declare how delicious a season it was—how especially gay and brilliant! It was over at last, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse conveyed her niece to Brighton, where, on the windy downs so familiar to her girlhood, Cecil found a pensive kind of pleasure in wandering alone, with her seal-skin jacket wrapped tightly across her chest, and the plumes of her little hat fluttering in the autumn blast. The weather could not be too cold or too dull for Cecil. She

went to look at the little lonely house where so many years of her joyless life had been passed, and standing in the distance, she looked sadly at the familiar windows, the patch of lawn, where the salt sea-breezes had blighted her geraniums, where the cruel breath of the mistral had slain her pet-blossoms of rose and honeysuckle.

"I did not know *him* when I lived there," she thought. "What foolish creatures women must be! It seems to me now as if there could not have been a time in which I did not know him. Hector Gordon! His name would have meant nothing if I had heard it then; and now the sound of any other name at all like his sends a thrill of anguish through my heart."

After the autumn at Brighton, there came the dowager's customary winter round of visits, the Christmas festivities, the refined hospitality of a modern country-house, from which only the coarser elements of old-fashioned joviality have been eliminated. It was all very cheery and pleasant, and to any one but a young lady with a broken heart could scarcely have failed to prove

delightful. Other people besides Lady Cecil had their troubles, and contrived to forget them. Gay young bachelors blotted from their memory the amounts of their tailors'-bills, and the threatening phraseology of lawyers'-letters, which had followed them even to that hospitable shelter; match-making matrons forgot the ages of their daughters and the failures of the past season, the tendency of dear Maria's nose to get a little red after dinner, and the alarming sharpness of poor Sophy's shoulders; Paterfamilias forgot the delinquencies of his favourite son—it almost always is the favourite son who turns out so badly; and the young Cantab, who had lately been plucked, lulled himself into a sweet unconsciousness of his featherless condition. Grim Care found the door of Annerwold Manor House shut in his face, and was fain to obtain an entrance to the hospitable mansion by sneaking down the chimney of Cecil's chamber to haunt the girl with the memory of Hector Gordon's face as she lay awake in the dead of the night.

She could not forget him—yet. When the

first snowdrops peeped pale and pure from their sheltering leaves, the dowager went back to Dorset Square, and all the old dreary round of housekeeping detail began again for Cecil Chudleigh. The spoons and the china, the butcher's uncertainty as to weight, and the poulterer's extortionate prices, seemed more than usually wearisome to Cecil this year. Her burden had been easy to bear before the coming of Hector Gordon —before that one bright interval in her life, by contrast with which the rest of her existence was so dull and joyless. He had loved her—and left her. It was her own decision which had separated them for ever. But sometimes—in some weak moment of depression, some foolish dreamy interval of reverie—there arose before her the vision of what might have been, if the man who loved her had refused to accept her decision; if love had been stronger than reason; if, in spite of herself, he had beaten down the barrier that divided them, and had stayed in England to make her his wife.

"How do I know that this girl loves him as

well as I do?" she thought, bitterly. "My aunt may be right, perhaps, in her worldly wisdom, and this Miss Chesham may have only cared for him because he was a good match. Girls are sent out to India on purpose to get married, and how can it be expected they should be otherwise than mercenary?"

But in the next moment Lady Cecil reproached herself for having thought so basely of her happy rival. The heart of Lord Aspendell's daughter was brave and generous, womanly and true; but there are moments of weakness and uncertainty which overtake the noblest of the vanquished in the battle of life.

In these weak moments Cecil tried in vain to shut from her mind the picture of what her life might have been if Hector Gordon had been free to marry her. She had loved him for himself alone, and would have loved him as truly if he had been penniless; but in her thought of him she could not forget the fact of his wealth. That gold which is so sordid a thing in itself is also the keystone to many things that are not sordid; and

the only man who needs be ashamed of his affection for the yellow dross is he who loves it with a morbid and diseased passion for the stuff itself, and not the noble uses that may be made of it.

Cecil remembered the Scotchman's wealth, and all the power that goes along with wealth, and there rose before her the vision of a spot in which her childhood had been spent, and which she loved with a passionate affection; a place she never hoped to see again, except in her dreams; and the image of it haunted her in them when she was most sorrowful—most weary of the joyless gaieties of her London life.

The place was a long rambling white house, built under the shelter of woody hills, and surrounded by the loveliest gardens in North Devon. It lay hidden in the very heart of a wood, and was called Chudleigh Combe. You heard the distant roar of the waves breaking on a rocky shore, and only by that sound knew how near all that luxuriant pastoral beauty was to the mighty grandeur of the sea. Within a mile of Chudleigh Combe there was a tiny fishing-village,

a steep hilly street almost inaccessible to any but its wild denizens, a bay of bright-yellow sand, and a ruined fortress on a rock. The place had been invaded lately by exploring tourists, some of whom found their way to Chudleigh, where there were a few valueless old pictures, of the most severely-dingy school; a handsome collection of Oriental china, and a good deal of quaint old furniture; brass-inlaid chests of drawers, wherein Evelina and Cecilia might have kept their finery; Indian *secrétaires*, at which Clarissa Harlowe might have written her famous letters; high-backed chairs, off which Sir Charles Grandison might have sat, gentleman-like and unbending.

The exploring tourists of these latter days were told that the Chudleigh-Combe estate had been bought by the grandfather of the late Lord Aspendell, and paid for with his wife's fortune; and that the mansion had been built by the same Earl, and paid for with the same money. The estate had never been entailed, and had been sold by the last Earl, Cecil's father, to a wealthy citizen, who, after occupying the lonely mansion

through a rainy summer, repented himself bitterly of his bargain, and tried to sell the estate; but an estate buried in Devonian woods, and twenty miles from a railroad, is not every one's money; and while Chudleigh Combe was yet in the market the merchant died, leaving a will so badly worded as to occasion a Chancery suit. This suit had been pending for more than a year, and the house was left in charge of a superannuated cook, and the grounds in custody of a couple of gardeners.

It was this place whose image haunted Cecil in her dreams, the scene in which her childhood had been passed, and the spot which was associated with the happiest period of her life. She thought how easy a thing it would have been for Hector Gordon to buy Chudleigh Combe, and to take her back to the familiar gardens—the dear old-fashioned rooms: how easy, if there had been no such person as Mary Chesham.

The old life in Dorset Square brought with it all the old responsibilities. The dowager's health had been very uncertain all through the winter,

and the dowager's temper was something worse than uncertain. She had founded high hopes on the chance of a marriage between her nephew and niece, a marriage which should bring Hector Gordon and Hector Gordon's wealth comfortably under her dominion: and now that all those fond expectations had been disappointed, she was inclined to resent her disappointment as a wrong inflicted upon her by Cecil.

In such peevish lamentations did Mrs. MacClaverhouse bewail her poverty at this period, that Cecil began to feel herself a burden on her aunt's slender income, and to taste all the bitterness that poisons the bread of dependence. She did not know the world well enough to know that there are people to whom it is delightful to grumble, —mental voluptuaries, who would be unhappy if they could find no crumpled rose-leaf for the justification of their discontent. Cecil fancied that her protectress had substantial cause for her lamentations, and she began to be ashamed of her useless life and the trifling expenses which her presence inflicted upon her kinswoman.

"I am as well educated as most of the governesses I have met with, auntie," she said once; "why shouldn't I go out as a governess, and earn my living?"

"What!" screamed the dowager; "Lord Aspendell's daughter would be a nice sort of person to teach a regiment of tiresome brats for twenty pounds a-year. Upon my word, Cecil, I haven't common patience with you when I hear you talk such nonsense."

"But I needn't tell people who I am, auntie, if there's any reason why a nobleman's daughter shouldn't earn her living. I could call myself Miss Chudleigh—or Miss anything—and I might earn more than twenty pounds a-year."

"Nonsense, child; don't let me hear any more of such absurdity. What's to become of my silver, I should like to know, if you leave me? I consider it very unkind and heartless of you to talk of deserting me."

"But I wouldn't leave you for the world, auntie, if I really am any use or any comfort to you," answered Cecil, tenderly; "only—some-

times I can't help thinking that I am a burden to you."

"Wait till I tell you that you are a burden, Lady Cecil," replied the dowager severely. "I have been disappointed about you and Hector, and I don't deny that I have felt the disappointment very deeply; but—well, that's over, and I suppose I am to end my days in Dorset Square. It might have been all very different if the General had been tolerably prudent; however, all I have to say is, that if I were as poor as Job, no niece of mine should degrade herself by going out as a governess."

Lady Cecil bowed her head to this decision, but she remembered, with a sigh, how many governesses she had seen in the households of her friends, who were infinitely less dependent, than she was, and whose lives were infinitely happier than hers. The sordid cares of Dorset Square were heavier than usual this year, for her aunt's feeble health threw the weight of financial and housekeeping arrangements entirely upon Cecil; and to this were added the constant anxiety of the

sick-room, the long summer days spent in the stifling atmosphere of a sunny drawing-room, whose windows were rarely opened from dawn to sunset, the tension of the mind kept always on the stretch to amuse or soothe a peevish invalid; and Lady Cecil bore all her trials with meek uncomplaining patience. She was very patient; and in the unbroken round of her daily duties she found very little time to think of her one great sorrow, —so little time that the shadow of the past grew dim, and dimmer, until she was able to remember Hector Gordon with perfect resignation to the fate that had separated her from him, and to hear his name spoken suddenly without a painful consciousness of the hot blood rushing to her cheeks.

The season was drawing to a close, and the early glories of the Lady's Mile had faded, when the dowager was well enough to array herself in black silk and diamonds, and to go to parties once more. She was nothing if not a woman of the world, and the chief consolation of her sick chamber had been the friendly visits of other dowagers and gossiping maiden-ladies, who brought her the

freshest scandals of the West End. To her the dulness of the Dorset Square drawing-room had been far more painful than to Cecil; and within a week from the day on which her medical man pronounced her well enough to take an airing in the phantom chariot, she buckled on her armour of state, and accompanied Cecil to a ball at the house of the fashionable physician who had attended her occasionally during her illness.

It was at this assembly that Cecil Chudleigh met the person who was destined to exercise a very powerful influence over her fate. Once in every season Dr. Molyneux's sombre old house in Harley Street burst into a sudden blaze of splendour and brightness. Once in every season the marble busts of divers pagan notabilities, more or less connected with the science of medicine, trembled on their scagliola pedestals as the light feet of fashionable beauty, and the varnished boots of gilded youth, trod the physician's stately chambers. The popular medical man gave many parties—snug dinners, at which the amber wines of the fair Rhineland, and the violet-scented vint-

ages of Burgundy, were consumed by connoisseurs who could fix the date of a vintage as easily as an archæologist decides the period of a frieze or a column. But these pleasant dinner-parties were given chiefly to learned old fogies of the doctor's own profession, and were given for the doctor's own pleasure. It was only once in a year that he flung open his house for the benefit of polite society in general, and his own patients in particular. Gunter had *carte blanche* on these occasions, and sent in a bill some six months afterwards, which was by no means a *carte blanche*. Groves of exotics and wagon-loads of evergreens came to Harley Street from unknown regions beyond the Edgeware Road, and the doctor's patients, calling upon him on the morning before the festival, found the sombre hall a forest of moderator lamps and candelabra, and the dining-room, in which they were wont to wait the great physician's summons, completely abandoned to the possession of the confectioner's minions.

Every one who was worth meeting was to be met at Dr. Molyneux's parties. Fashionable

countesses, and pretty daughters of nameless citizens from far northern regions of commercial splendour beyond Islington and Hackney; cabinet ministers and briefless barristers; a popular actor who had been taken up by the aristocracy; literary men and African explorers; the very latest celebrity in the musical world; and the last promoter of the last company for the cultivation of the art of lace-making by spiders, or the construction of a canal across the Isthmus of Panama —all these and many more were to be met in the Harley Street drawing-rooms, or on the Harley Street staircase; for it was only the more adventurous spirits who penetrated the drawing-room, or heard any thing but the highest notes of the last Scandinavian tenor. There were people who preferred the desultory snatches of conversation, and rapid circulation of new arrivals, on Dr. Molyneux's staircase to the splendid crush of his rooms. In the crowded drawing-rooms Beauty waxed pale in the glare of lamps and tapers, but on the staircase wandering breezes from open windows and doors fluttered the gauzy draperies

of youth and the stately plumage of age; and there was a dash of Bohemianism in the gaiety, which is apt to be pleasing to modern revellers. For a thorough-going, cross-country flirtation there was no place like Dr. Molyneux's broad landing. There were deep window-seats that must surely have been devised by some designing architect with a special view to the annihilation of masculine peace, and the triumph of feminine loveliness. There were stands of exotics whose friendly shade protected Edwin the briefless and Angelina the beautiful from the awful eye of Angelina's mamma. There were statuettes of marble and Parian, in pretended contemplation of which Celadon and Amelia could bask in the light of each other's eyes, while Amelia's papa was powerless to tear her from the companionship of her penniless adorer. There were voluminous curtains falling artistically from the carved cornices of massive doorways, beneath whose shelter irrevocable engagements were made, only to be broken by death, or the distracting complications of an ensuing season.

Arriving late at Dr. Molyneux's assembly, the

energetic dowager was fain to content herself with a resting-place in one of the broad window-seats, where she installed herself very comfortably, but much to the discomfiture of a young lady in pink *tulle*, spotted and festooned with innocent white daisies. The damsel in pink had been working the destruction—in a clubbable point of view—of an aristocratic Guardsman of six feet two and a half, but the advent of the Scottish widow scared her covey, and the irrevocable word remained unspoken. The dowager, who read almost every thing that was to be read, had fallen on a new view of some important feature in the science of physiology, and insisted upon discussing her theories with a distinguished surgeon; while Cecil, very weary and indifferent, found her way to a seat on the broad flight of stairs leading to an upper floor, and sat there above an animated group of pretty girls who were eating ices and talking through the banisters to the gilded youth upon the lower stairs. Sitting here, enthroned above the rest, as on a daïs, and fanning herself listlessly, Lady Cecil was seen by the man

who was to make himself the master of her destiny.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. MacClaverhouse and her niece, when the gilded youth upon the staircase were fluttered by the advent of a sturdy stranger, whose broad shoulders made a passage through the elegant crowd very much as a blundering collier might cut her way athwart a fleet of prize wherries; while a massive forehead, and a bush of straight brown hair arose above all those beautiful partings and ambrosial locks of exactly the same pattern.

The gilded youth, turning indignantly upon the pushing stranger with the stalwart shoulders and resolute elbows, beheld a man who was known to most people by sight, and to all England by the record of his doings and sayings in the newspapers. The pushing stranger was no other than Mr. O'Boyneville, Queen's Counsel, one of the most popular men at the English Bar, and the man whose reckless audacity and ready cleverness had won more causes than were ever gained

by the eloquence of a Berryer or the splendid declamation of an Erskine.

The loungers on the staircase were almost reconciled to being pushed when they discovered how popular a man had elbowed them; and several claimed acquaintance with the great O'Boyneville.

"Read your speech in that breach of promise case," said one; "never read any thing so jolly."

"I should like to have seen you and Valentine pitching into each other in the Common Pleas yesterday. It isn't every man who can shut up Valentine," said another.

Mr. O'Boyneville bestowed a friendly nod upon his admirers. He had all that easy consciousness of his own abilities, and good-natured wish not to be proud, which seems a distinguishing characteristic of the Hibernian mind. He pushed his way upward, nodding right and left, but his mind was at that moment full of a great case of Vendors and Purchasers, speedily to be decided in one of the Courts of Equity, in which some Irish

slate-quarries were distractingly involved with the operations of a gigantic builder, and in which innumerable folios of affidavits had been filed on both sides. The great barrister was by no means a party-going man, and the gilded youth made merry upon the antediluvian cut of his dress coat, the yellow tinge of his cambric cravat, and the high shirt-collars which fenced his massive jaws, as he passed out of their ken. He came to Dr. Molyneux's ball only because the doctor was his personal friend, and had carried him through a very sharp attack of brain fever induced by overwork; but he would fain have taken his red bag with him, and, ensconced in some obscure corner, have refreshed himself with a dip into the great slate case.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with massively cut features, a mouth and chin that were almost classic in their modelling, strongly marked eyebrows, and large bright blue eyes—the eyes that are better adapted to "threaten and command" than to melt with tenderness or darken with melancholy. Nobody had ever

called him handsome, nobody had ever called him plain. In his face and figure alike there was a daring that was almost insolence, a manliness that approached nobility. He was the man of men to wear a barrister's wig and gown, to wind himself into the innermost souls of irresolute jurymen, and to freeze the heart's blood of timid witnesses.

When something less than forty, Laurence O'Boyneville had found himself the most successful man of his age, far higher on the ladder of fortune than many men who were twenty years his seniors and who had worked well too in their time. But to the Irish lawyer had been given an indomitable energy, which is so good a substitute for the sacred fire of genius, that it is very apt to be mistaken for that supernal flame. Nature had bestowed upon him, and education had sharpened, a rapidity of perception that was almost like inspiration; and the more desperate the case he had undertaken, the more brilliant was his handling of its difficulties, the more daring his defiance of his opponent. He had the true warrior spirit, and

rose with the desperation of anticipated defeat. His greatest triumphs had been achieved by movements as wildly hazardous as the charge of the six hundred at Balaclava.

He was a Charles the Twelth, a Frederick the Great, a Napoleon, of the Bar, and he enjoyed a good fight as only the born warrior can enjoy it. For seventeen years he had known no interest and found no pleasure outside his profession. Patiently and uncomplainingly he had passed through his probationary years of poverty and disappointment. He had seen his contemporaries—young men who had started with as much ambition as himself—grow weary of the long waiting, and turn aside to begin anew in other and easier paths the pursuit of fortune. But he held on; and from the first insignificant chance that had been flung in his way, to the full triumphs of his present position, he never swerved by one hair's-breadth from the line he had drawn for himself, or neglected the smallest opportunity.

He found himself rapidly growing rich, for he had neither time nor inclination for the spending

of money. He exacted his price, in that tacit manner peculiar to his profession, but he set little value on the produce of his labour when the golden stream flowed in upon him. He neither drank nor smoked. He rarely played at any game of hazard; and though, while watching the Derby canter with ignorant eyes, his rapid perception showed him the one horse out of twenty whose build stamped him a winner, he had only been induced to visit a race-course some half-dozen times in the twenty years of his London life.

In all those twenty years Laurence O'Boyneville had been a voluntary exile from feminine society. The successful barrister has no time for flower-shows or fancy-fairs, morning concerts or archæological-society meetings, picnics, kettle-drums or *thés dansantes*. For him the days are too short for social intercourse, the nights too brief for rest. And Mr. O'Boyneville loved his profession, and had given all his mind to the labour of his love.

The years went by him with all their changes of fashion, and left him unchanged. His brief

holidays were scarcely times of rest, for he carried his work with him wherever he went. Thus it was that at nearly forty years of age the mighty Laurence was still a bachelor. He had seen pretty women, and had admired them, with an artistic pleasure in a pretty face; but they had passed him by like the shadows of fair women in the poet's vision. He had no time for more than transient admiration—or let it rather be said that as yet the one face which was to awake his soul from its dull slumber had not dawned upon him.

Mr. O'Boyneville was rich, and was known to be rich; and on those rare occasions when he did appear in society he found himself received with extreme courtesy by some members of the gentler sex. There were mothers with unmarried daughters of five-and-thirty who would have been quite willing to cultivate Mr. O'Boyneville's acquaintance; but the Irish luminary appeared only to vanish; and the fair damsels of five-and-thirty who were so inclined to be interested in his triumphs, and so ready to talk of his last great success, had little opportunity of impressing him with their

intellectual graces or charming him by their amiability.

For twenty years from the day in which he had come from the banks of the Shannon to drop friendless into the wilderness of London, with only one letter of introduction and one five-pound note in his pocket, until to-day, when his name was a synonym for daring and success, he had gone scatheless. Cupid's fatal shadow rarely darkens the sombre thresholds of the Temple, nor does the god care to penetrate those courts of law where his name has so often been taken in vain by mercenary damsels seeking golden ointments for the wounds inflicted by his arrows. Pretty witnesses had stepped into the box believing their charms invincible, and had retired weeping after a verbal contest with the great O'Boyneville, as some tender fawn may fly, mauled and torn by the mighty boar of the forest. Grecian noses and timid blue eyes, blooming cheeks rendered more blooming by the coquettish adjustment of a spotted veil, might exercise a charm of potent power in other regions; but they availed nothing when

Laurence O'Boyneville rose to cross-examine the witnesses of his opponent.

"Put up your veil, ma'am, and let us see your face, if you please," he said at starting. And then came the torture,—the searching tone of voice, that seemed to imply an occult knowledge; the see-sawing of trivial facts, which seemed to transform the moral standpoint of the witness into a shifting quicksand of uncertainty; the frivolous questions beside the subject, that seemed so foolish and unmeaning, till all in a moment they wove themselves into a fatal web in which the witness was inextricably entangled. In such ordeals Beauty appealed vainly to the merciless advocate; and, having derived his chief knowledge of the fair sex from witnesses in *nisi prius*, breach-of-promise, and divorce cases, it may be that Mr. O'Boyneville's estimate of womankind was scarcely an elevated one.

Of all living creatures, perhaps Laurence O'Boyneville would have seemed to a superficial observer the last to fall a victim to a sudden and unreasoning passion. When a man attains the

age of forty without one pulse of his heart being quickened by any tender emotion, it is to be expected that he will jog quietly on to fifty; and that if then he dislikes the prospect of a lonely old age, uncheered except by the attentions of a housekeeper—who, if she does not poison him with subtle doses of tartar emetic, will most likely forge a codicil to his will, and possess herself of his goods and chattels when he is dead,—he will look out for some wealthy widow of his own age, and settle quietly down to the enjoyment of ponderous dinners and expensive wines. And yet, on reflection, it seems very probable that the busy man—the plodding labourer in the arid fields of life—is the most likely subject for that sudden love which springs into life vigorous and perfect as Minerva when she burst armed and helmeted from the brain of Jove. The man most apt to fall in love with unknown Beauty in an omnibus, is the man who has least time for the cultivation of accredited Beauty's society in the drawing-rooms of his friends. Sooner or later the god claims his prey; and the unbeliever who has gone

scatheless for twenty years has good reason to dread the chances of the one-and-twentieth. Mr. O'Boyneville pushed his way up Dr. Molyneux's staircase at half-past eleven a free man; but he descended the same staircase at a quarter to one as fettered a slave as Samson when they bore him from the false embraces of Delilah; and yet no artful enchantress spread her nets for his entanglement, no mercenary Circe wove her spell for his destruction.

The crowd upon the landing-place grew closer as the night waxed older, and in the confusion occasioned by one set of people always struggling to get away, and another set of people always struggling to get into the drawing-rooms, to say nothing of chivalrous young men for ever striving to carry ices or other airy refreshment to distressed damsels, the loungers who did not care about dancing had enough to do to keep their ground. It was this perpetual motion that drove the mighty O'Boyneville on to the very flight of stairs where Cecil sat pensive and silent, while the buzz of voices around her grew every moment louder.

Having nothing better to do, the barrister lounged with his back against the wall and looked down at the fair aristocratic face of his neighbour, while he meditated upon the great slate case. But being a student of character, he fell to musing on the lady sitting below him—sitting almost at his feet, as it were, with only the width of the stair-carpet between them.

"I shouldn't like to drive *her* too hard," he thought, "if I had her as a witness on the other side. She's the sort of woman who could keep her self-possession, and make a man look foolish. I saw Valentine tackle such a woman once, and he got considerably the worst of it."

And then, after ruminating for some minutes upon an intricate point in the slate case, he took courage and addressed Lady Cecil. His Hibernian daring rarely abandoned him, even in that feminine society to which he was so unaccustomed; and yet there was a kind of restraint upon him to-night, and a strange schoolboy feeling took possession of him as he spoke to Cecil.

"Do you like this sort of thing?" he asked. "Molyneux saved my life three years ago, or I shouldn't be here: but he can't have saved the lives of all these people; and yet, if he hasn't, I don't understand why they come here."

"Dr. Molyneux is very popular," answered Cecil, smiling a little at the barrister's manner. "I think he almost saved my aunt's life in the spring; and if every body here has as much reason as I have to be grateful to him, they may very well endure a little crushing. Besides, one is crushed quite as much at other houses, where the parties are not so pleasant."

Mr. O'Boyneville shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose there are sane people who consider this sort of thing agreeable," said he; "it is one of the enigmas of social life. I am a working man, and the mysteries of fashion are a sealed book to me. But of course, if it is the fashion to be hustled upon a staircase, people will submit to be hustled on a staircase, just as the Chinese women pinch their feet, and savages flatten their skulls and elongate their ears. So

Molyneux attended your aunt, did he? Is she with you to-night?"

"O yes, she is here."

Cecil glanced unconsciously towards the embrasure between the curtains where the dowager was seated as she said this; and Mr. O'Boyneville, accustomed to watch the glances of witnesses and jurymen, was quick to interpret her look.

"The lady in black is your aunt," he said. "What's her name?"

"MacClaverhouse," answered Cecil, looking with some wonder at this uncivilised stranger who questioned her so coolly.

"I suppose he is an American," she thought; "and yet he doesn't talk like one."

"And you are Miss MacClaverhouse, of course?" said the presumptuous O'Boyneville. He was determined to know who this young lady was—this aristocratic beauty with the fair classic face and listless manner. Another man would have left Cecil unmolested, and would have stolen away to extract the information he wanted from the master of the house; but the unsophisticated

O'Boyneville had no idea of any such diplomacy. He had been asking questions all his life, and he questioned Cecil almost as he would have questioned one of his own witnesses, with a friendly unceremoniousness.

"My name is Chudleigh," said the young lady, very coldly.

"Why, that's the name of the Aspendell family; and you belong to that family, I suppose, Miss Chudleigh?"

"Yes; the late Lord Aspendell was my father."

"Indeed! Ah! I met the Earl once, ten years ago; and that unfortunate young man who ran through so much money, and was killed in the Alps?"

"He was my brother," murmured Cecil, rising as if she would have made her escape from this uncivilised monster.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times. Yes, to be sure, I ought to have remembered that. Your brother, of course; and I suppose he really *did* contrive to make away with every acre of the Aspendell property, eh?"

Lady Cecil looked indignantly at her questioner, and the stairs immediately below her being a little clearer just now, she moved downwards and made her way towards her aunt. The barrister looked after her with a bewildered aspect.

"I suppose she didn't like my talking to her about her brother," he thought. "He was a thorough young scamp, if ever there was one. And the present Lord Aspendell must be as poor as Job. And this girl's his niece, I suppose, or his cousin. Poor and proud—that's a pity! and she's a nice girl too."

He looked after her; she was entering the dancing-room on the arm of an irreproachable cavalier. Mr. O'Boyneville watched her till she disappeared, and then tried to take up the thread of his meditations upon the slate case at the exact point at which he had dropped it.

But for once in his life he found his thoughts wandering away from the contemplation of his professional duties. The image of the patrician face on which he had so lately been looking

haunted him as no such image had ever haunted him before.

"I am sorry I offended her," he thought, "for she really seems a nice girl."

The doctor came out upon the landing in animated conversation with one of his guests at this very moment, and perceiving Mrs. MacClaverhouse in the shadow of the window-curtains, stopped to give her cordial greeting.

"I have seen Lady Cecil, and she told me where to look for you," said the physician. "Won't you come into the rooms? We're a little crowded, but I'll find you a comfortable seat; and Herr Kerskratten, the German bass, is going to sing his great drinking-song."

But before Dr. Molyneux could steer the dowager through the crowd about the doorway, Mr. O'Boyneville had pushed his way to the elbow of his physician, whom he saluted in that sonorous voice which was one of the most useful gifts a liberal nature had bestowed upon him. After a briefly cordial greeting, the Irishman bent his head to whisper in the ear of his friend—

"Introduce me to the old lady."

Dr. Molyneux looked at him in some astonishment as he complied.

"I know you are a hunter of lions, Mrs. MacClaverhouse," he said, "so I don't think it would be fair if I didn't introduce you to a gentleman whose name must be tolerably familiar to you in the law reports that enliven your morning papers. Mr. O'Boyneville—Mrs. MacClaverhouse."

The barrister, who had found so little to say to Lady Cecil, recovered the natural flow of his eloquence in the society of the dowager, and made himself eminently agreeable to that lady. He took her quite off the hands of her host, and contrived to find her a corner on a sofa near the piano, where some ladies of the wallflower species were primly seated. He talked with more animation than was pleasant to the German bass during that gentleman's great song; but Mrs. MacClaverhouse was one of those people who make a point of chattering throughout the progress of a musical performance, and praising it loudly when it is

concluded. She was delighted with the Irish barrister, and from her he obtained all the information he wanted about Lady Cecil Chudleigh. Perhaps the wily dowager perceived that this uncivilised Hercules of the law courts was smitten by her niece's tranquil beauty, and knew that he was rich, and speculated upon the possibility of his being able to support that corner house in Hyde-Park Gardens, for whose lofty chambers her spirit languished. However it might be, she was monstrously civil to the great O'Boyneville; and before her niece came to seek her she had invited him to dine in Dorset Square at an early date, to meet a distinguished luminary of the Sudder Dewanee.

Cecil did not condescend to honour the Irishman by one glance as she talked to her aunt.

"Shall we go now, auntie? The rooms are very warm, and I am sure you must be tired."

"I suppose that means that *you* are tired," answered Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "However, I'm quite ready to take my departure."

"Shall I go and look for your carriage?" asked Mr. O'Boyneville.

"No, thanks," Cecil replied, very coldly. "Captain Norris has been kind enough to go in search of it. He will not fetch us till it is really at the door, auntie."

"I hope not," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "But I sometimes fancy Dr. Molyneux sows the seeds of his winter bronchitis cases while his visitors are waiting for their carriages in that windy vestibule of his. Perhaps you'll be good enough to get me through the middle passage, Mr. O'Boyneville, while Captain Norris looks after my niece."

Captain Norris, the irreproachable gentleman who had walked the solemn measures of a quadrille with Cecil, arrived at this moment, flushed, but triumphant.

"The carriage is there, Mrs. MacClaverhouse. May I offer you my arm?"

But the dowager slipped her hand over Mr. O'Boyneville's sleeve, and the Captain took possession of Cecil. There were a good many pauses on the way, pleasant salutations, and friendly greetings; but in due time the ladies were safely

installed in their chariot; and looking out into the summer night, Cecil was obliged to bow to Mr. O'Boyneville, who stood bare-headed upon the pavement.

"What a horrible man, auntie!" she exclaimed, with something like a shudder; "and how could you be so friendly with him?"

And Mr. O'Boyneville, on his way to a big house in Bloomsbury, where he ate his hurried meals and took his brief night's rest, and which was popularly supposed to be his home, abandoned himself to musings of quite a different fashion.

"If ever I were to marry," he thought—"and heaven knows it's a remote contingency—I would marry such a woman as Lady Cecil Chudleigh."

Many men have pronounced such resolutions as this, and have lived to ally themselves to the most vulgar opposite of their chosen ideal; but then Laurence O'Boyneville was a man with whom will was power.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOWAGER'S LITTLE DINNER.

LADY CECIL was both surprised and annoyed when the dowager announced Mr. O'Boyneville as one of the guests at her next little dinner.

"How could you ask that dreadful man, auntie?" she said.

"Because the dreadful man is a very distinguished person—in the law; and as Mr. Horley, the Indian judge, dines with us next Wednesday, I thought I could not do better than ask this Irish barrister. I know those lawyer people like to meet one another; though goodness knows, with salmon at half-a-crown a pound, and ducklings at eight shillings a pair, I ought not to involve myself in the expense of dinner-parties."

Cecil shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly as she seated herself at her piano after this little

discussion. It mattered so little to her who came to her aunt's dinner-parties. Imagine the indifference of Lucy Ashton as to the guests who partook of the Lord Keeper's ponderous banquets during that dreary interval in which Ravenswood was away. But poor Cecil obeyed her aunt's orders, and did battle with the poulterer for a reduction in the price of his ducklings, and went through all manner of intricate calculations as to the difference between the expense of lobster cutlets and fricandeau, or oyster patties and chicken rissoles.

"I think Spickson makes his lobster cutlets smaller than ever this year," said Mrs. Mac-Claverhouse, as she looked over the confectioner's list of made-dishes; "and as to his fricandeaus, I am always on tenterhooks for fear they shouldn't go decently round the table, and I can't get that man Peters to calculate his spoonfuls; and if he's weak enough to let people help themselves, there's sure to be unfairness about the truffles; though what any one can admire in truffles is one of the mysteries I have never been able to fathom. As

to dessert, Cecil, I shall take the carriage into the City to-morrow morning, and get what I want; for I've no notion of paying eightpence apiece in Convent Garden for peaches that I can get in Thames Street for threepence."

On the appointed evening Cecil was the first to enter the drawing-room; for the dowager had taken a siesta after luncheon, and was late at her toilette. Dressed in some transparent fabric of pale-blue, with a fluttering knot of ribbon here and there, and a turquoise cross upon her neck, Lady Cecil looked very elegant, very pretty, with that delicate loveliness which so rarely kindled into brilliancy, with that patrician calm which so seldom warmed into animation. She looked at the clock on the chimney-piece as she took a book from a cabinet where a few of her aunt's choicest volumes were ranged on alternate shelves with china teacups and quaint old Oriental monsters. "Only seven; and the people are asked for half-past, which always means eight," she thought, as she sank listlessly into a low chair near the open window.

She opened her book and tried to read. It was a volume of Shelley; and the dreamy mysticism of the verse soothed her with its magic harmony. The shadows of her life had been fading gradually away from her within the last few months, but no sunshine had succeeded the darkness. She was too gentle and womanly to be cynical; but an indifference to every thing on earth—an indifference almost as profound as the dreary *ennui* of Hamlet—had come down upon her.

And yet she went to parties and danced quadrilles, and even waltzed on occasions. To dance and to make merry while the ruthless serpent gnaws at the heart is no new pastime. There is something pathetic in the simplicity with which Lucy Aikin tells us how the great Elizabeth went to a festival while her favourite—her Benjamin of favourites—the brilliant Essex, languished under the burden of her dread displeasure; while the imperious spirit of the Ruler was at war with the woman's doting heart, and the most terrible struggle of her life was going forward. There

was dancing at my Lord Cobham's that night, and a masque performed by women, and one of these ladies wooed the Queen to dance. "Who are you?" asked the Sovereign. "My name is Affection," returned the masquer. "*Affection*," said the queen, "*is false!*" And *yet* she danced, remarks the historian with unconscious pathos.

It was only ten minutes after seven, and Cecil was quite absorbed in the pages of Alastor, when the door was flung open with the stately swing peculiar to the accomplished dairyman who did duty as butler on the dowager's reception days, and the accomplished dairyman announced with perfect distinctness,—

"Mr. O'Boyneville."

Accomplished as the dairyman was, he might have made a mess of any other name; but the great barrister's appellation was "familiar in his ear as household words;" and he had many "household words" with his better half when the propensity for strong drinks, contracted in the riotous days of his butlerhood, beguiled him from the domestic shelter. He knew Mr. O'Boyne-

ville, and had sat on juries in the courts where that gentleman was mighty, and had been cajoled by the Irishman's insidious eloquence and slap-dash mode of argument. He had laughed over Mr. O'Boyneville's speeches and cross-examinations recorded in the newspapers; and he ushered the barrister into the little drawing-room in Dorset Square with all the respect due to so brilliant a luminary.

Cecil was very much annoyed by the Irishman's early arrival; but he was her aunt's guest, and she was bound to receive him courteously. She laid aside her book, and made the barrister a curtsey.

And the brilliant O'Boyneville—the man with whom cool impudence often rose to the level of genius—that luminary before whom the lesser lights of the bar waxed faint and pale, how did his familiarity with feminine psychology, as exhibited in the witness-box, serve him in the dowager's drawing-room? Alas for Hibernian wit and Hibernian audacity! for Mr. O'Boyneville could think of no more interesting subject of

remark at this moment than the fact that the day had been warm: and a warm day in the last week of June is not exactly a notable phenomenon.

Lady Cecil agreed to the barrister's statement with regard to the weather, and then went on to say that town was not so full as it had been: and this is again not exactly a phenomenon in the last week of June.

"I don't know about that, Lady Cecil," replied Mr. O'Boyneville. "If you'd been in the court of Common Pleas this morning you'd not have thought London empty." And then there was a pause; for the barrister, being more accustomed to browbeat and terrify the fair sex than to make small-talk for their amusement, found himself brought to a standstill; and Cecil did not like her aunt's guest well enough to make any desperate conversational plunge.

He sat looking at her in silence; not with the bold stare of admiration with which he was wont to take a feminine witness off her guard before entrapping her into prevarication or perjury, but

with a more earnest gaze than he had ever fixed on any woman's face before.

"She reminds me of my mother," he thought; "and yet it's only a pale shadow I can remember when I think of my mother. I was such a child when she died."

Lady Cecil glanced at her aunt's new acquaintance as he sat opposite to her. He was quite different from any one she ever had seen before; and to her eyes—so accustomed to look upon the graceful perfection, the harmonious elegance of high-bred youth, there was something almost uncivilised in his aspect. He wore the high shirt-collars in which she had seen him at the doctor's ball, the tight-fitting dress coat of a departed age, a rusty black cravat, and boots of dubious symmetry. His brown hair was thick and long; but the massive head had something leonine in its character; the aquiline nose and large bright blue eyes had that stamp of power which is so near akin to beauty. That brief contemplation of Laurence O'Boyneville awakened Cecil Chudleigh to the consciousness that the

"dreadful man" to whom she so much objected was not quite the kind of person to be despised.

"I daresay he is clever — in his own way," she thought; "but what could have induced my aunt to ask him to dinner?"

She was spared the trouble of finding some new subject wherewith to bridge the gulf of silence yawning so blankly between her and the barrister, for the all-accomplished cowkeeper announced Mr. and Miss Crawford; and wherever Flo went she put to flight the dull horror of silence. The Crawfords had been invited to please Lady Cecil; "and because Mr. Crawford is a nice sort of person to have, you know, my dear," the dowager said to one of her confidantes; "for there is such a rage about these painter people just now, and I assure you his place at Kensington is a perfect palace, with marble pillars in the hall, and old stained-glass windows, and carved oak panels, that he has picked up at Antwerp; and I hear the prices he gets for his pictures are *something fabulous;* but he's the dearest unaffected creature you ever met; and if you like to come on Wed-

nesday night between nine and ten, you shall see him."

Flo greeted her dearest Cecil with enthusiasm, and saluted Mr. O'Boyneville with the faintest indication of a curtsey as she swept her silken skirts past him; and then, when she had shaken hands with her dearest friend, she turned to look at the barrister with a charmingly insolent little look, which seemed to express, "And what outlandish creature are *you*, I wonder?" Of course Mr. Crawford knew the great Q.C. Almost every male inhabitant of London was familiar with that ponderous figure and defiant face. Few were the dwellers in the mighty City who had not seen those big white hands waved in the face of an opponent, or lifted in the denunciatory periods of virtuous indignation. The painter began to talk to the barrister, and in a moment the great Laurence was at his ease. He knew how to talk—with men,—and there was no question within the regions of heaven or earth too mighty for his audacity, too small for his powers of argument. He would have talked to Herschel about the last

discovery in the starry system; and it is ten to one but in a mixed company he would have made Herschel look foolish: he would have demonstrated before the face of Newton that his theory of gravitation was a false one; he would have offered for Mr. Paul Bedford's consideration new views upon the subject of "Jolly Nose;" or if a question of tailoring had arisen in an assembly of tailors, he would have proved to the satisfaction of the company that he alone amongst them all had fully mastered the science of cutting out a coat. Was it not his business to know every thing, or to seem to know every thing? If any mad-brained counsel on the opposite side had been pleased to set a flute or "recorder" before him, would it not have been his duty to play a tune thereupon for the edification of the court? There was no subject that he had not been called upon to handle in the course of his legal career. He had pleaded the cause of a musician whose copyright in a ballad had been assailed on the ground of plagiarism, and—ignorant of a note of music—had talked the jury into idiocy

with a farrago of sounding nonsense such as "the syncopated passage in the second bar of my client's composition, gentlemen, is said to resemble the third bar of Mozart's sonato in C minor; but to any one who is familiar with the first principles of harmony, gentlemen, the introduction of the supertonic in place of the subdominant must be a convincing proof of the falsehood of this assertion; and if any thing were required to demonstrate the puerility of the argument adopted by my learned friend on the other side, it would be the group of semiquavers which concludes the phrase." He had carried a French milliner triumphantly through all the intricacies of an action against an aristocratic customer for the recovery of a disputed account, and had demonstrated with crushing force the meanness of the lady defendant, and the honesty of his client's charges. To the lookers-on from the outer world his triumphs may have appeared easy. It seemed as if he had only to elevate his voice with a certain emphasis, and to look round the court with a certain self-assured smile, and lo his audience rejoiced and were merry.

"The great question at issue, gentlemen of the jury, is the question of '*trimmings*.' (Laughter.) You have all of you heard, no doubt, of a leg of mutton and trimmings (renewed laughter); but the trimmings in question are of far greater value than the turnips of a Cincinnatus, or the potatoes of a Raleigh. The question in point, gentlemen, if I may venture upon that play of words which the great Samuel Johnson held in such detestation, is a question *of* point. The point-lace flounce, for which my client charges one hundred and thirty-nine pounds fourteen and sixpence, was, I am told, one of the rarest specimens of the workmanship of the Beguines of Flanders. And who and what are these Beguines, gentlemen of the jury, by whose patient fingers this delicate fabric was manufactured? Were they common workwomen, to be recompensed at a common rate? No, gentlemen of the jury, they were ladies—ladies of honourable lineage and independent means, who of their own free will retired into a Beguinage—a religious house, which was yet not a convent; and

there, free from the bondage of any formal vow, they devoted themselves to the consolation of the poor and afflicted, and the manufacture of that rare old lace which is now the proudest boast of our female aristocracy. Why, gentlemen, the price demanded by my client is something pitiful when we remember the circumstances under which that point-lace was made—the taper fingers that have toiled to fashion those intricate arabesques—the solitary tears that have bedewed the fairy fabric."

And here it may be that the great O'Boyneville himself produced a palpable tear on the end of his finger, and gazed at it for a moment in absence of mind, as wondering what it was,—or seemed so to gaze, while in reality his piercing eye shot towards the jury to see whether they were laughing at him, or whether his rodomontade had told. This was the man who had found himself so ill at ease in the society of one beautiful woman.

The dowager appeared presently.

"O, you too-punctual people!" exclaimed the lively Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "You come to see an old woman who lives in lodgings, and I dare-

say you expect every thing as well *réglé* as if you were going to dine at Mr. Horborough's palace in Park Lane. How do you do, Florence my dear? —How d'ye do, Crawford? So you and Mr. O'Boyneville are old friends? That's very nice; but I hope you're not going to talk about texture and modelling *all* the evening. Do you know we had a couple of musical celebrities once at one of the General's dinners in Portland Place, and they talked about harmony and composition all dinner-time; and as they sat on opposite sides of the table, it was *so* agreeable for the rest of the company. 'Do you know what that fellow Simpkins will do?' says Brown. 'Why, he'll use consecutive fifths,—he's got them more than once in that last sonata of his.' 'God bless my soul!' cried Smith, 'I never thought much of him, but I did not suppose he was capable of *that*.' And that's the way they went on the whole evening. So, you dear Crawford, tell us as many nice stories about your artist friends as you can—about their having their furniture seized by sheriffs' officers, and taking their pig pictures

wet to that stupid pawnbroker, who rubs out a pig with his thumb; and dying in sponging-houses; and stabbing their models in order to get the proper contraction of the muscles; but please *don't* be technical."

The Indian notability made his appearance presently, with a very stately wife in brown velvet and carbuncles; a costume which Flo declared reminded her of haunch-of-mutton and currant-jelly. To Mr. O'Boyneville's escort this stately matron was intrusted; an elegant young Belgian diplomatist, who spoke very little English, took charge of Florence, while Mr. Crawford devoted himself to Cecil, and the Judge of the Sudder Dewanee offered his arm to Mrs. Mac-Claverhouse, whose brain was racked by doubts as to whether the salmon would go comfortably round, or whether those two ninepenny lobsters ordered for the sauce were equal to the eighteen-penny one which she had rejected, suspecting sinister motives lurking in the mind of the fishmonger who had recommended it. The dinner *à la Russe* is a splendid institution for the economical

housekeeper, and might on some occasions be called a dinner *à la ruse;* so artful are the manœuvres by which half-a-dozen oyster-patties, or a few ounces of chicken and a handful of asparagus tops, can be made to do duty for a course; so inexpensive are the desserts, which consist chiefly of fossilised conserves and uneatable bonbons, and which are of so indestructible a nature that they will last a managing hostess as long as a chancery-suit.

The dinner went off well. Mrs. MacClaverhouse's little dinners were almost always successful, in spite of those conflicting emotions which agitated the heart of the hostess.

The Indian judge and the Irish barrister talked *shop;* and there was a very animated discussion of a great international-law case, the details of which had filled the columns of the *Times* for the last three weeks—a case in which masculine intelligence perceived a thrilling interest, but which to the female mind appeared only a hopeless complication of politics and ship-building. In so small a party the conversation was tolerably general.

Mr. Crawford entered heartily into the ship-building case; and only Florence and the elegant young diplomatist were confidential, chattering gaily in that exquisite language which seems to have been invented in the interests of coquetry. The gentlemen came to the drawing-room very soon after the ladies had settled themselves in opposite corners: Florence and Cecil on a cosy little sofa by the open window—a sofa just large enough to accommodate their ample skirts; the dowager and the judge's wife on easy-chairs near a ground-glass screen which concealed the empty grate. Florence had so much intelligence of a peculiarly confidential nature to impart to her friend, that she looked almost coldly on the elegant young Belgian when he presented himself before her. It is very nice for a young lady, whose French is undoubtedly Parisian, to discuss Lamartine and De Vigny, Hugo and Chateaubriand—and such other Gallic luminaries whose works a young lady may discuss—with an agreeable companion; but Florence Crawford had made a conquest within the last week, and was bright with all the radiance

of a new triumph, and unutterably eager to impart the tidings of her last success to Cecil.

"He has called on papa twice within the week, dear," said the animated Flo in that confidential undertone which is the next thing to whispering; "and papa says it is the most absurd thing in the world to hear him ordering pictures: he has asked papa to paint him two. And when he was asked if he had any special idea of his own about the subject, he said no, but he wanted them to fit the recesses between the windows of his billiard-room at Pevenshall—he has a place called Pevenshall somewhere in that dreadful north; for he is rich—*à millions*, you know—*tout ce qu'il y a de plus Manchester*. His father and grandfather made all the money, and he is to spend it. I am sure he would never have made any for himself. But papa has declined the unfortunate young man's commission. Fancy one of papa's Cleopatras stinging herself to death between the windows of a Manchester man's billiard-room! There are men in Manchester who know art thoroughly, papa says; and it is utterly absurd for a painter

to turn up his nose at the patronage of traders; for if you go into the galleries of those dear old sleepy towns in Belgium, you'll find that the noblest works of your Van Eycks and Hans what's-his-names were paid for by wealthy citizens; and what a blessing the modern patrons don't insist on having themselves painted, looking through cupboards, or riding on horseback, in the corner of a picture! Imagine a Manchester man's head poking through a hole in the sky in Mr. Millais' 'Vale of Rest,' or peering out of a cupboard in a corner of Mr. Frith's 'Derby Day'! However, papa has declined to paint any thing for Mr. Lobyer; so the unfortunate young man will have no excuse for calling on unorthodox occasions."

"But he must be a very stupid person, Florence. I cannot imagine your taking any interest in him."

"Nor can I imagine myself tolerating his society for half-an-hour, if he were not what he is," answered Flo blithely. "Don't I tell you that he is the rich Mr. Lobyer? Even his name

is horrible, you see—Lobyer! He might make it a little better by tacking on some aristocratic *prénom*. Vavasour Lobyer, or Plantagenet Lobyer, or something of that kind, might sound almost tolerable. Yes, he is very stupid, Cecil; but he seems rather a good young fellow; he laughs good-naturedly when other people are laughing, and he gets on wonderfully with my cockatoos. There seems to be an instinctive kind of sympathy between him and cockatoos, and they allow him to rumple their feathers and scratch their foreheads in the most amiable manner. You know what a place the Fountains is, and how often I sit in the conservatory that leads to the painting-room, or else just outside papa's bay-window; so of course when Mr. Lobyer came to talk about the pictures, he loitered and hung about, playing with the birds, and sniffing at the flowers in that horrible fidgety manner peculiar to some young men, until papa came out of the painting-room to tell me I had better go for a drive, which meant that Mr. Lobyer was to take his departure. And I really think, Cecil, that if I had not kept

him at bay, that unfortunate young man would have made me an offer that very morning, after meeting me rather less than half-a-dozen times."

"But, Florence, you surely would never marry such a person?"

"For goodness' sake, Cecil, don't call him a person! Haven't I always told you that I meant to marry for money, and don't I tell you that Mr. Lobyer is preposterously rich? I acknowledge that he is stupid and ignorant—more Manchester than Manchester itself; but are there not guardsmen with long pedigrees who are as boorish and ignorant as Mr. Lobyer? I am not like those absurd girls who look in the glass and fancy they are like the two beautiful Miss Gunnings, and have only to show themselves in the park in order to captivate marquises and royal dukes."

"And you would really marry for money, Flory?" said Cecil very sadly.

"Is there any thing so well worth marrying for? Who was that stupid old legal person who said that knowledge is power? Why did he take bribes and sell public offices if he thought that?

Depend upon it, Cecil, that money is power, and the only power worth wielding. Money is power, and beauty, and grace, and fascination. Do you think Anne of Austria fell in love with plain George Villiers? No, Cecil; she fell in love with the Duke of Buckingham, and his white uncut-velvet suit, and his diamonds, and the jewels he dropped among her maids-of-honour, and all the pageantry and splendour around and about him."

Was it of any use to reason with a young lady who talked like this? Miss Crawford had enjoyed all those advantages of education which fall to the share of middle-class damsels of the present day, and the possession of which a century ago would have made a young lady a phenomenon. She spoke French perfectly; she knew a little Italian, and had read the *Promessi Sposi*, and could quote little bits of Dante and Petrarch; she could read German, and quoted Goethe and Schiller on occasions; she played brilliantly, and painted tolerably, and waltzed exquisitely; but of that moral education which some mothers and fathers bestow upon their children, Florence Crawford was ut-

terly destitute. She had brought herself up; and she prided herself on that high-bred heartlessness, or affectation of heartlessness, which seemed one of the most fashionable graces of her day. She had founded herself, as she fancied, on the best models.

"Better to be Becky Sharpe than Amelia Sedley," she said; "and the world is full of Beckys and Amelias."

She could find a very tolerable excuse for herself and her companions.

"The men complain that we are fast and mercenary; that we talk slang, and try to make rich marriages; and there are articles about us in the fashionable newspapers, just as if we were a new variety in animal creation, on view in Regent's Park. Do they ever stop to consider who taught us to be what we are? Can the gentlemen, whose highest praise of a woman is to say that she is jolly, and has no nonsense about her, and sits square on her horse, wonder very much if we cultivate the only accomplishments they admire?"

Cecil had often tried to remonstrate with her

volatile friend, and had as often found her efforts utterly thrown away. So to-night she allowed Flo to devote herself to the Belgian *attaché*, and abandoned herself to her own thoughts, only making a little pretence of joining in the conversation now and then. Sometimes, while she listlessly turned the leaves of an album, whose every leaf she knew by heart, Lady Cecil glanced upward to the angle of the mantelpiece by which Laurence O'Boyneville stood, in conversation with the judge and the painter; for, however charming the society of lovely and accomplished woman may be, men have an attraction for one another, in comparison with which all feminine witchery is weak and futile.

Looking at the little group by the chimney-piece, Cecil saw that the barrister had by far the largest share in the conversation. He was very animated, and those large white hands, which were so eminently useful to him in court, were considerably employed to illustrate his discourse. That he was talking well she could see in the attentive faces of his listeners, for Indian judges

and popular painters do not listen with any show of interest to a man who talks nonsense. Lady Cecil began to think that after all there must be something a little out of the common in this dreadful man.

The evening came to a close presently, and as he bent over Cecil to say good-night, Mr. O'Boyneville's manner was very much out of the common.

"I have been talking to your aunt, Lady Cecil," he said, "and she tells me you leave town early next week. I have asked permission to call on you to-morrow, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse has given it. So it is not good-bye, you see, but *au revoir*."

This was about the coolest speech which Cecil Chudleigh had ever had addressed to her. She looked at Mr. O'Boyneville with an expression of unmitigated astonishment, but he gave her hand a grip that wounded the slender fingers with the rings which adorned them, and departed.

"I've three hours' work to get through before I go to bed to-night," he said, as he went down-

stairs with the painter and his daughter; and so he had. The first hansom that he encountered conveyed him to that sepulchral mansion in Brunswick Square which he had chosen for his habitation; not because he particularly liked Brunswick Square, but because it was necessary for him to live somewhere.

He let himself into the gaunt stone hall with his latch-key, and walked straight to the library at the back of this spacious mansion—a gloomy chamber lined with law-books, and provided with that species of furniture which may be seen exhibited by the merchants of Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. This dismal apartment was the retreat in which Mr. O'Boyneville spent the greater part of his home-life. He very frequently took his dinner on the library-table, with his plate surrounded by papers, and an open brief propped up against his decanter of Manzanilla.

To-night he found the red bag, which his clerk had brought from the Temple, waiting for him on the table. He did not open it quite at once. He did not pounce upon its contents as he

had been wont to do. He sat for some minutes leaning back in his chair, with a smile upon his face—a dreamy smile, which was new to that eager, resolute countenance, so well known to the legal world for its hawk-like glances and insolent defiance.

"My own sweet darling!" he thought; "and I shall have a wife and a home! Good heavens! how many years of my life I have spent without ever dreaming of any such happiness! And now —now—I wonder that I could have lived so long as I have; I wonder that I could have lived without *her*."

And then, after abandoning himself a little longer to this delicious reverie, he roused himself with an effort, and opened his bag.

But as he took out the first handful of papers, he exclaimed with a sigh,

"And yet, God knows, I wish I had never seen her. I went on so well before, and my mind was free for my work; and now—"

He began to read, and in five minutes' time was as deeply absorbed in his papers as if no such

person as Cecil Chudleigh had existed. And yet he loved her—with that foolish and unreasoning passion called love at sight—with that love which, coming for the first time to a man of his age, comes as surely for the last.

CHAPTER IX.

LAURENCE O'BOYNEVILLE'S FIRST HEARING.

To the dowager Mr. O'Boyneville had been very confidential. He was as frank and ingenuous as some lovesick schoolboy in his revelation of that sudden affection with which Cecil Chudleigh's pensive face had inspired him. The unconscious audacity which was one of the chief attributes of his character supported him in a position in which another man of his age and habits would have suffered an agony of self-consciousness, a torturing sense of his own foolishness. He was close upon forty years of age. His childhood had been spent on the greensward of Irish hills and valleys, among the wildest of Hibernian agriculturists; his boyhood had been passed in an Irish city, far south of the brilliant capital; his manhood had been a long, scrambling, helter-skelter journey upon one

of the dustiest and most toilsome roads of modern life. His habits were not the habits of the men who were to be met in Cecil Chudleigh's world; his cleverness was not their cleverness; and those graces and accomplishments which, in their education, had been the first consideration, were just the very points which in his rough schooling had been neglected or ignored.

Another man, under such circumstances—and even another Irishman — might have regarded Lady Cecil from afar with fond admiring glances, and returned to his law-library in Bloomsbury, or his dusty chambers in the Temple, not scatheless, but hopeless: and despair being a fever of but brief duration—it is your intermittent sickness of alternate hope and fear that hangs so long about the sufferer—the victim might have speedily recovered the wound inflicted by a flying Cupid's random shot. But it was not thus with Laurence O'Boyneville. He knew that he was eight-and-thirty, and that he looked five years older; nor was it long since the tailor, who made those garments which the barrister insisted should be con-

structed after the fashion of his youth, had sighed as he took his patron's measure, murmuring plaintively, "Another inch round the waist, Mr. O'Boyneville! and, bless my heart, it seems only yesterday when twenty-five inches was your figure!"

The barrister, contemplating himself in the glass during the process of shaving, and scowling —not at himself, but at the visionary countenance of the sarcastic Valentine or the unctuous O'Smea, with whom he was to do battle before the day was done—might have perceived, had he chosen to consider the matter, that he was by no means the sort of person whom women call handsome. The strongly-marked eyebrows, so quick to contract above the cold blue eyes; the aquiline nose, the firmly-set lips, the massive chin, and the broad square brow, with its prominent range of perceptive organs overshadowing the eyes—these were not the component parts of a countenance on which women care to dwell with admiring glances.

But that which would most likely have discomfited other men had no power to abash or to disturb the resolute spirit of Laurence O'Boyne-

ville. Perhaps the secret of his audacity was that he had never failed in any thing. From the boyish days when he had breasted the falls of the Shannon and done battle with the power of the waters, his career had been one long hand-to-hand struggle with difficulties. Penniless, he had succeeded where other men's money had been powerless to win them success. Friendless, he had trampled upon the fallen hopes of rivals who could boast of kindred and friendship with the mighty ones of the earth. A stranger and an alien, he had won for himself wealth and renown in a country in which vulgar prejudice had made the very name of his people a byword and a reproach.

Was this a man to be turned aside from his purpose because the woman with whom he had fallen in love happened to be above him in rank, and the daughter of a world with which his world had nothing in common? No. After seeing Cecil Chudleigh for the first time, Laurence O'Boyneville decided that he would never marry any other woman. On seeing her for the second time, he determined to marry *her*. The most presuming of

coxcombs could scarcely have been more sublimely assured of his own invincibility. And yet the barrister had nothing in common with a coxcomb. He was only accustomed to succeed. If he wanted to do any thing, he did it; and opposition or difficulty only gave a keener zest to the process of achievement. He wanted to marry Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and he meant to marry her. She might object at first, of course. People almost always did object to his doing what he wanted to do; but he always did it. Had not his professional rivals objected to his success, and banded themselves together to keep him down, and had he not succeeded in spite of them?

In his native wilds Mr. O'Boyneville might have twirled his shillalah and screamed horoo! so light were his spirits as he set forth to call on the lady of his love. In civilised and crowded London he could only swing his stick loosely in his hand as he strode triumphantly from the hall of the wasted footsteps; whereby he drew down upon himself the maledictions of an elderly gentleman whose shins the weapon had smitten in

descending. That the pavements of the metropolis had *not* been laid down for his sole accommodation was a side of the question which Mr. O'Boyneville had never taken the trouble to contemplate.

He had been to Westminster, had heard the opening of a case in which he was concerned, and had given his brief and whispered his instructions to Hodger, a painstaking junior, who was very glad to do suit and service to the great O'Boyneville. The great O'Boyneville's client—a soapboiler in Lambeth, who was at war with his parish upon the question of whether he did or did not consume his own smoke—was by no means gratified by the substitution, and looked as black as if he had indeed, in his own proper person, consumed all the smoke of his furnaces. But the distinguished Irishman strode away from Westminster heedless of his client's rage. It was very rarely that Laurence O'Boyneville gave his work to another man. The solicitors who swore by him told their clients that if O'Boyneville undertook a case, he would see it through to the very end.

"There never was such a resolute beggar," said a fast young attorney, who had witnessed one of the Q.C.'s triumphs; "the more desperate a case is, the sweeter O'Boyneville is upon it. He has all the Hibernian love of fighting; and if any body says 'Peas,' he's ready to spill his blood in the cause of 'Beans.' Egad! if there were a Victoria Cross for desperate valour exhibited in the law-courts, Larry O'Boyneville's silk gown ought to be decorated with it."

But to-day, for the first time in his life, the barrister neglected his work for his own pleasure. That solemn crisis, which for some butterfly creatures comes once or twice in every London season, came to this man for the first time after twenty years of manhood. He was in love, and he was going to ask the woman he loved to be his wife. He was going to ask her to marry him—and he had met her on Dr. Molyneux's staircase—and he had watched her at a dinner-party as she talked to her aunt's guests! He knew her so little, and yet was eager to win her for his wife. "Good heavens!" exclaims Common Sense,

"what a fool the man must be!" And yet for once, dear, simple, straightforward Common Sense is out in her reckoning; for Laurence O'Boyneville knew Cecil Chudleigh better than she was known by her most intimate friends. It was a gift with him, this intuitive knowledge of human character, this rapid perception of human motive; and it was by the possession of this gift, quite as much as by his cool audacity or showy eloquence, that the Irish barrister had made for himself a name and a position. Before a witness had kissed the Book and answered a preliminary question or two, Laurence O'Boyneville knew what manner of man the witness was. Show him the most trumpery photograph that was ever bought for eighteenpence, and he would penetrate the inmost depths of that man's mind whose face was dimly shadowed in the smudgy portrait. It was doubtful if he had ever read Lavater—and yet more doubtful if he had waded through the big volumes of George Combe; and yet he was in his own person an unconscious Lavater, and to him the teaching of the great Combe could have im-

parted no new wisdom. A man's eyes are not overshadowed by a bumpy ridge for nothing; and to Laurence O'Boyneville had been given in excess that wondrous faculty called perception.

He had scrutinised Lady Cecil with eyes that were experienced in the reading of every expression the human countenance is capable of assuming. He knew that she was pure, and true, and generous, and high-minded. A little proud, perhaps, but only just as proud as a good woman has need to be in a bad world. He knew that she was a prize worth winning, and he meant to win her. No apprehension of failure troubled the serenity of his mind. He did not expect to win her all at once. Had it not cost him fifteen years of hard labour to obtain his silk gown? and could he expect that Providence would give him this far higher prize without inflicting on him some interval for the exercise of his patience—some manner of probationary ordeal for the trial of his faith and devotion? Mr. O'Boyneville did not believe in that French proverb which asserts that happiness comes to the sleeper.

"I will serve my seven years' apprenticeship —and my seven years after that, if necessary— but she shall be my wife before I die," thought Laurence. But it may be that Mr. O'Boyneville's fourteen years was only a figurative expression, for he said to himself presently:

"If I play my cards well, we may be married in the long vacation; and then I'd take my wife to Ireland, and get a glimpse of the Shannon for the first time these twenty years."

Arrived in Dorset Square, Mr. O'Boyneville did not endanger his prospects by any untimely modesty. He told the servant who opened the door that he came by appointment; and when the dowager's own maid emerged from some dusky back-parlour, whence issued that odour of heated iron and singed blanket which attends the getting-up of feminine muslins and laces, he brushed unceremoniously by that prim young person, and made his way upstairs. Fortune favoured him. She seems but a craven-spirited divinity, after all, and always places herself on the side of the audacious. Cecil Chudleigh was sitting at the

piano, not playing, but leaning over the keyboard in a thoughtful attitude, with her head resting on one hand, while the listless fingers of the other trifled with the leaves of her music-book.

She looked up as the door opened, and her face betrayed any thing but pleasure as she recognised her visitor. He had prepared her to expect such an intrusion, but she had not expected him so early, and had engaged an ally in the person of Florence Crawford, who had promised to come to her dearest Cecil directly after breakfast. Unfortunately, Flo's "directly after breakfast" meant any time between ten and two; and as the dowager rarely made her appearance before luncheon, poor Cecil had to encounter the great O'Boyneville alone.

But in spite of the special manner in which the popular barrister had announced his coming, Cecil had no suspicion that the visit itself was to be of any special nature. No eccentricity could have surprised her in the wearer of that tight-sleeved frock-coat and those exploded shirt-collars, in which Mr. O'Boyneville exhibited himself for the

edification of modern society. His solemn announcement of course only referred to the conventional morning-call of the grateful diner-out—the stamped receipt for an agreeable entertainment. Lady Cecil was prepared to be a little bored by the eccentric Irishman's visit, and "there an end."

"I wish Flo had been here to talk to him," she thought wearily; "Flo could receive a deputation of aldermen, or a church-commission, whatever that is."

Mr. O'Boyneville murmured some feeble truism in reference to the weather. In spite of his audacity—in spite of his calm assurance and unfaltering faith in ultimate victory—his ease of manner, his popular swagger, and his ready flow of language abandoned him for the moment when he found himself in the presence of that unconscious enchantress who had awakened the soul of a middle-aged barrister from its twenty years' torpor.

But the paralysis called bashfulness was a very temporary affliction with Mr. O'Boyneville. Before he had been talking ten minutes to Lady

Cecil, he had drawn his chair close to the piano by which she was still seated; before he had been talking to her twenty minutes, he had asked her to be his wife.

She looked at him with a smile of utter incredulity.

"Mr. O'Boyneville," she exclaimed, "you must surely intend this for a jest! and, believe me, it is a very foolish one."

"A jest, Lady Cecil! What, don't you know sincerity when you meet with it? Well, I confess it was foolish of me to come to you like this, and to tell you I'd fallen over head and ears in love with you, before a fine gentleman of the modern school would presume to ask you how you are. But you see, Lady Cecil, I'm not a fine gentleman. For the first seventeen years of my life I lived amongst people almost as simple and primitive as those happy savages Columbus found in Hispaniola. For the last twenty years I have been too hard a worker in my own world to have any leisure in which to acquire the thoughts and ways of yours. I never thought that any break would

come in the rapid current of my busy life, but—I suppose there is one fateful hour in every man's existence. I, who so seldom go to parties, went to Molyneux's ball; I, who so seldom talk to young ladies, talked to you; and before I turned the corner of Harley Street that night, my destiny was a settled thing. 'She has come,' said I, 'and she brings my fate in her hand.' To my mind, Lady Cecil, that which your romance-writer and your poet call love at sight—'if not an Adam at his birth, he is no Love at all;' and so on—is rather an intuitive consciousness, which a man has in the hour that brings him face to face with the woman who is to be the happiness or the misery of his life. I am not going to use high-flown language, Lady Cecil. Eloquence is my stock-in-trade elsewhere. The words cannot be too plain in which I tell you that I love you. There is very little to be said in my favour. I am what people call well off; but you might reasonably expect to marry a much richer man. I come of a good old Irish family; but proscription has diminished its lands to a single farm, and the taint of treason has blotted its name.

I am nearly twenty years your senior, and I have few of the accomplishments which distinguish the young men of the present day. It is the cause of the leaden casket which I am pleading, Lady Cecil; and against all the outward splendour of gold and silver which my rivals can boast, I can set nothing except the unselfishness of my love, the strength of my devotion."

Cecil had listened very patiently to this address. She could not doubt the depth of feeling which was breathed in every accent of the barrister's voice, subdued and grave in tone, and altogether different from the sonorous thunder which so often awoke the echoes of the law-courts. She was touched by his appeal, though it stirred no warmer feeling than a gentle thrill of womanly pity. It is not in the nature of a woman to feel unkindly to the lowest of human beings who reveals to her a pure and noble affection. A Miranda will pardon and pity a Caliban if his devotion is instinct with the divinity of innocent love.

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. O'Boyneville?" asked Lady Cecil.

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

"I am very sorry for it—I am very sorry," answered Cecil, gently. "I am sure I need not tell you that I am touched and flattered by your preference for me, eccentric as it may be: but you must be indeed a stranger to the society of women if you can imagine that any woman, knowing as little of you as I do, could reply otherwise than in the negative to such an offer as you have made me."

"Yes, I daresay it's very absurd," murmured Mr. O'Boyneville, despondingly; "it's my headlong way of doing things—a national characteristic, I suppose, Lady Cecil. I ought to have waited a week or two—till we knew each other—intimately—and then—Would there have been any hope for me if I had waited a week or two?" asked the barrister, in that soft insinuating tone to which he had been known to drop after a burst of loud and lofty declamation, with a sudden transition of style that had often proved irresistible with an impressionable jury.

Cecil Chudleigh shook her head gently.

"I might have been less surprised by your flattering proposal, Mr. O'Boyneville," she said; "but no circumstances could possibly arise under which I could give you any other answer than that I have given you to-day."

"And that answer is 'No'?"

"It is, Mr. O'Boyneville."

"Irrevocably no?"

"Irrevocably."

"Lady Cecil, forgive me if I ask you a question. Is there any one—any one who occupies the place in your heart that it would be my dearest hope to win for myself? Ah, you don't know how patiently I would bide my time if there were ever so distant a gleam of sunshine to lure me on! Is there any one else, Lady Cecil?"

"No, there is no one else."

"Ah, then that's bad indeed," said the Irishman, with a sigh; "if there'd been any one else, I might have hoped—" Mr. O'Boyneville's habit of subduing the stolidity of a jury by a happy colloquialism, when all grandiloquence of language had failed to produce an effect, very nearly be-

trayed him into saying, "to punch his head." He pulled himself up with an effort, and concluded, "I might have hoped to prove myself the worthier man of the two. But if there is no one, Lady Cecil, and you say the answer is irrevocable, my doom is sealed. I will not tell you that I shall die broken-hearted; for in this bustling nineteenth century men have no time to break their hearts in the old-fashioned way. They can only overwork their brains, and die of some commonplace heart-disease. The effect of your rejection will be that I shall work, if any thing, harder than I have been accustomed to work, and go down to my grave a single man. And now I'll not bore you any longer, Lady Cecil, and I hope you'll forget that I've talked about any thing that isn't appropriate conversation for an ordinary morning call."

He held out his hand as frankly as if he had shaken off all sense of mortification or disappointment. Lady Cecil had received her due share of matrimonial proposals, and had been accustomed to see a rejected swain depart with an air of dig-

nified sulkiness. There seemed to be something almost magnanimous in the Irishman's simple heartiness of manner. It appeared as if he were rather anxious to relieve Cecil from any natural embarrassment, than oppressed by a sense of his own humiliation. She shook hands with him very cordially, and thought better of him in this moment of parting than she had thought yet. But she did not make him any conventional speech about her desire to retain his friendship, or her anxiety respecting his ultimate happiness. She fancied that his sudden passion was only the folly of an overgrown schoolboy, and she had little fear of the consequences of her rejection.

"I daresay he falls in love with some one every week of his life, and passes his existence in making offers that are refused," she thought, as she sat down to the piano after he had left her.

But even after thinking thus of her departed admirer, Cecil could not altogether dismiss him from her mind. She might smile at the remembrance of his folly, but she could not question his sincerity. For the moment, at least, he had been

in earnest. But then it is the nature of an Irishman to be desperately in earnest about trifles. The arrival of a bloom-coloured coat from Mr. Filby the tailor seems as great an event to Goldsmith as the grant of a pension can appear to the calmer mind of Johnson.

Mr. O'Boyneville walked away from Dorset Square vanquished, but not disheartened. He had been prepared for a rejection of his suit; but for him Cecil's irrevocable no was not entirely appalling. His experience had shown him many a verdict set aside, many a decision appealed against. And are there not courts of appeal in the kingdom of lovers, as well as in the vulgar every-day world of lawyers? In spite of what the barrister had said to Lady Cecil, he had been much relieved by her assurance that her heart and hand were alike disengaged. He had affected the resignation of despair, while a glow of hope had gently warmed his breast; and as he swaggered along the pavement of Baker Street on the watch for a passing hansom, he had by no means the appearance of a rejected and desponding lover.

"I daresay she'll think me a fool for my pains, but at any rate she *will* think of me, and that's something," mused Mr. O'Boyneville. "How prettily her eyelids drooped when she gave me her irrevocable answer—just as if she shrank from seeing the disappointment in my face! And how good and true and pure she is! There'd be little need for divorce-courts, and less work for the lawyers, if all women were like her; and I don't despair of calling her Lady Cecil O'Boyneville yet. There never was a good woman who wasn't to be won by the love of an honest man, provided there's no mistake about his love or his honesty. There's not a day of one's life but one hears of oddly-matched couples. What could pretty Mrs. Green have seen in that awkward lout Green? says Gossip. Why, what should she see except that he loved her better than any other man in creation? And then, if Fate is the master of men, Circumstance is the tyrant of women. A man may marry the woman he wishes to marry: a woman can only marry the man who wishes to marry her."

And at this point the barrister espied an approaching hansom, and beckoned to the driver.

"I may be in time to see the soap-boiler through his troubles yet," he thought, as he sprang into the vehicle. "Westminster Hall, cabby, and lose no time about it."

CHAPTER X.

THE RICH MR. LOBYER.

BEFORE the season was over, Lady Cecil enjoyed the honour of an introduction to Florence Crawford's wealthy admirer, Mr. Thomas Lobyer, of Pevenshall Place, Yorkshire, and of the Lobyer Mills in the cotton country. The dowager and her niece were amongst the Sunday-evening droppers-in at the Fountains within a week of Mr. O'Boyneville's declaration; and it was on that occasion that Cecil beheld her friend's admirer for the first time. The deeply-smitten Lobyer had made good use of the Sunday-evening privilege, and every sabbath found him lounging with a lumbering gait and creaking footsteps in the painter's pretty drawing-rooms, or lurking darkly in the dimmer light of the conservatories, where he held mysterious converse with the cockatoos.

It was not that he so especially affected the society of cockatoos; but he was a young man who always seemed restless and uneasy if deprived of the companionship of some animal. He carried a toy-terrier in his pocket when he made morning calls, and caressed the miniature brute stealthily in the frequent pauses of the conversation. He was dull and embarrassed in the presence of an accomplished young lady, but he got on admirably with a ferret or a weasel; and there were people who said he could have made himself at home with a boa-constrictor. The cry of "Rats!" stirred him with as profound a thrill of emotion as that which vibrates through the frame of a thorough-bred Dandy Dinmont, or agitates the bosom of a sharp young bull-terrier.

He was fond of his horses, and still more fond of his dogs; but the animals he affected were not the mighty natives of Newfoundland or the noble denizens of Mount St. Bernard. The dogs which Mr. Lobyer purchased at high prices from crack dog-fanciers were generally accomplished ratters, and miniature specimens of the bull-dog tribe,

renowned for their tendency to attach themselves to the calves of unoffending legs, and their high-bred objection to being severed from their prey.

As the uncertain temper and occasional restlessness of his favourite terriers rendered it rather dangerous to take them to evening parties, Mr. Lobyer was always glad to fall back upon the society of any animal attached to the household in which he visited. He would retire into a dusky corner, and stir up the inhabitants of an aquarium with the point of his gold pencil, in the apparent hope of getting up intimate relations with a jelly-fish. He would beguile the golden inmates of a crystal globe by tearing up minute fragments of one of his visiting-cards, and passing them off for such edible morsels as unwise benevolence offers to gold-fish. His intercourse with the inferior animals was not necessarily of a friendly order. His hands were disfigured by the teeth of his dogs, goaded into desperation by his playful sallies; for it was sometimes his humour to worry the distinguished ratters very much as the distinguished ratters worried the rats.

In sorrowful earnest, Mr. Lobyer was not a nice young man. He was rich; and there were many people who would have been very glad to think him nice, but who were fain to abandon the attempt, and to demand tribute of admiration for their favourite on other and loftier grounds. And this was very easily done. There is no cub so brutish, no lout so clumsy, uncouth, and insolent, who cannot be made to pass for a rough diamond. Society—especially represented by matrons with marriageable daughters—decided that Mr. Lobyer was a rough diamond, a dear good candid creature, who blurted out every thing he thought. He was an original character; and his unpolished manners were quite a relief after the *fade* graces and courtesies of over-educated young diplomatists and amateur *littérateurs*. This was what people said of Mr. Lobyer during the two seasons in which he exhibited his clumsy figure and his bullet head in the assemblies of second-rate fashion—not the *crême de la crême*, but that excellent milk from whose surface a very decent layer of cream may be gathered in a second skimming

—and society smiled upon the wealthiest bachelor from Cottonopolis. He was neither handsome nor clever; he was neither amiable nor well-bred; but he was the wealthiest available bachelor in the circles which he adorned.

The gold-worshippers, who saw in Mr. Lobyer the genius of commercial prosperity, were anxious to make the best of their idol. He had feminine admirers who called him handsome; he had masculine allies who declared that he was clever. His features were regular, but cast in that heavy mould which seems better adapted to a good-looking animal than a handsome man. He had big brown eyes; but so has a Newfoundland dog; and the eyes of an intelligent dog possess a beauty of expression which was utterly wanting in the round Vandyke-brown orbs of Thomas Lobyer. His complexion was dark and sallow—pale always—but capable of assuming an unpleasant livid whiteness when he was very angry. The physiognomists were tolerably unanimous as to the character of his thick red lips and sloping chin; but the fair denizens of the western suburbs

were equally unanimous in their admiration of his carefully-trained moustache, and the luxuriant beard amidst which he was wont to entangle his fingers when temporarily excluded from animal society.

He dressed well,—for he had just sufficient good taste to know that his taste was bad, and he delivered himself an unreasoning block of humanity into the hands of the most expensive West-end tailor.

"*I* don't pretend to know much about the build of the thing," he said, when complimented on the fashion of a new overcoat; "but my fellow charges me what he likes, and he gets a cheque for his account by return of post. So I suppose I'm a good customer."

Mr. Lobyer had a lodging in Jermyn Street—a *pied-à-terre*, he called it. And it is to be set down to his credit that his French would have inflicted no outrage on ears accustomed to the pure accents of the Français. The days are past in which commercial wealth and ignorance have gone hand in hand. The *parvenu* of to-day is

generally an elegant and highly-accomplished gentleman, who has seen every thing that is to be seen, and been taught every thing that an expensive course of education can teach. Mr. Lobyer had played cricket with young lordlings on the meads of Eton—he had been plucked at Oxford—he had scampered over Europe, and improved his mind in the society of the crocodiles of the Nile—he had steeped himself to the lips in the worst dissipations of Paris, and had given as much pain and anxiety to a very worthy father as can well be concentrated in the declining years of a parent's life.

There were scandalmongers in the cotton country who said that Thomas Lobyer junior had broken the heart of Thomas Lobyer senior. He was an only son—an only child; and the wealthy manufacturer had beguiled the dull routine of his business life by a splendid dream during the years of his son's boyhood. If the boy had been a prince his education could scarcely have been more carefully supervised, or paid for with a more lavish hand. But conscientious tutors washed their hands of the profitable pupil

when they found that he was stupid and arrogant, profligate and hypocritical, and that he was gifted with a bull-dog obstinacy which rendered all efforts at correction hopeless.

The time came, before the death of his father, when there was no alternative but to let him go his own way.

"I might disinherit you, and leave my money to an hospital," wrote the old man, in the last letter he ever addressed to his son; "and God knows you have given me enough provocation to do so. But if I could forget that you are the child of the wife I loved, I should still be deterred from such a step by the fear of its consequences. If you have done so badly with all the advantages of wealth, what would become of you exposed to the temptations of poverty? Your grandfather began life as a workhouse apprentice—there are plenty of people in Manchester who know all about him; but there wasn't a man in his native city who wasn't proud to shake him by the hand, or a woman who didn't point to him as an example to her sons."

Thomas Lobyer the elder died within a few weeks after the writing of this epistle; and his son, who was giving a charming little dinner to some distinguished friends in the Pavilion of the Hôtel Henri Quatre at St. Germains, while his father lay dying at Pevenshall, was summoned homeward by a telegram, and arrived to find himself sole master of the accumulated fruits of two industrious lives. The young man's acquaintances and neighbours, his agents and advisers, were loud in his praises during his brief residence at Pevenshall. It seemed as if the old story of Prince Henry's reform were going to be acted over again. Mr. Lobyer detained the lawyer who had made his father's will, and with that gentleman's assistance he entered into a searching investigation of his possessions. He, so dull to learn any thing appertaining to the graces of life, —he, so slow of intellect where the wisdom of sages or the harmonious numbers of poets were the subject of his study, proved himself a match for the keenest in all that affected his interests or touched his pocket. He, who had been so reck-

less in his extravagance while drawing on the resources of a generous father, astonished the family solicitor by the minuteness of his calculations, the sharp economy which prompted all the changes he made in his dead father's household, and the calm determination with which he announced that he should make a rule of only spending a third of his income during his bachelorhood.

"I don't wonder my father was always growling about *my* extravagance, considering the amount of money he contrived to get rid of here," said the amiable young man. "Two of the housemaids may go, and two of the grooms may go. One man will look after half-a-dozen horses in a livery-stable in London, and keep them in better condition than my horses are in; and one man can look after half-a-dozen here. I shall only come down in the hunting-season; and I don't want to pay lazy hulking fellows for gorging themselves with meat and making themselves dropsical with beer at my expense; and I don't want to pay young women for looking out of the

windows and talking to them. In the gardens I shall not make any changes; but I must have an arrangement made with the fruiterers in the market-town by which the forcing-houses may be made to pay their own expenses. When I marry and come to live here, I shall double the household, and build a new wing to the stables, for I like to see plenty of fellows, and horses and dogs, and that kind of thing, about a place; but for the present we must retrench, Mr. Gibson,—we must retrench."

Such was Mr. Lobyer. He came to London, and took his place in a certain circle of London society, with nothing to recommend him but a reputation for enormous wealth. There were those who remembered him in Paris, and who knew the manner in which he had completed his education in that brilliant capital. But if there went abroad the rumour that the millionaire's youth had been wild and foolish, feminine compassion and masculine generosity conspired to forget and ignore his early follies.

From a crowd of beautiful and intellectual

women the Manchester man might have chosen the loveliest, and would have incurred small hazard of a refusal. There were women who scorned his money as utterly as they despised himself; but in the drawing-rooms of Tyburnia and Kensingtonia those women were few and far between. The value of wealth increases with the growing refinement of taste. The purest attributes of the human mind—the love of art, the worship of beauty, the keen sense of grace—combine to render intellectual man the slave of material prosperity. The gems of ancient art, the work of modern artists, the thorough-bred hack on which Beauty prances in the Row, the villa on Streatham Common or the cottage by Strawberry Hill, for whose shelter the soul of the retiring citizen yearns as the refuge of his declining age,—all command a higher price every year; and every year the steady march of intellect advances, and there are more connoisseurs to sigh for old pictures, more would-be patrons of modern art, more citizens whose cultivated sense of the beautiful inspires a yearning for villas on

Streatham Common or cottages by Strawberry Hill, more ambitious middle-class belles who have seen from afar off the prancing of patrician Beauty's steeds, and who sigh for thorough-bred saddle-horses of their own.

Mr. Lobyer himself was unattractive; but in Mr. Lobyer's wealth there lurked the elements of all those costly treasures and refinements that make life beautiful. He was known to be stupid; and mercenary Beauty, jumping at a conclusion, decided that he was just the sort of person to submit himself unresistingly to the management of a wife. Under the wand of that enchantress, the dull figures in his banking-book might be transformed into the art-treasures of a second Grosvenor House, the gardens of a new Chatsworth, the stables of a Lord Stamford, a fairy boudoir which even the Empress Eugénie might approve, and jewels which the Duchess of Newcastle might admire and the Duke of Brunswick envy.

This was what portionless Beauty had in her mind when she smiled on Mr. Lobyer. Rich as he really was, the amount of his riches was doubled

and trebled by the tongue of rumour. And there is really something interesting in boundless wealth, for its own sake. It is a kind of power; and there seems to be some slavish attribute inherent in the breast of man, which prompts him to fawn upon every species of power, from the physical force of a Ben Caunt to the intellectual supremacy of a Voltaire. A flavour of Monte Christo hovered about the person of Thomas Lobyer; and though he had never been known to say any thing worth listening to, or to do any thing worth recording, he was interesting nevertheless. The men who had borrowed money from him, or who thought they might some day have occasion to borrow money of him, said that there was "a stamp of power about the fellow, you know;" and there was "something racy even in his cubbishness, you know, for it isn't every fellow would have the pluck to be such a thorough-bred cub."

There were people who called Mr. Lobyer generous; and there always will be people who will call the giver of sumptuous dinners a noble and generous creature. The man who keeps a

drag for his own pleasure, and allows his friends to ride upon the roof of it, is likely to be considered more or less their patron and benefactor, though their companionship is as indispensable to his triumph as the slaves who attend the chariot-wheels of an emperor are necessary to complete the glory of their master. Mr. Lobyer was as generous as the man who never stints the cost of his own pleasure; as mean as the man who grudges the outlay of a sixpence that is not spent for his own gratification.

This was the individual who, after inspiring alternate hope and despair in unnumbered breasts by the fickleness of his clumsy attentions, succumbed at last to the piquant charm of Florence Crawford's bright hair and tiny *retroussé* nose.

She was insolent to him, and her insolence charmed him, for it surprised him, and stirred the dull stagnation of his brain with a sensation that was like pleasure. She laughed at him; and he, so keen in his perception of the weaknesses of better men than himself, was weak enough to think that she alone, of all the women he knew,

was uninfluenced by any consideration of his wealth.

"The girls I meet make as much of me as if I were a sultan, and seem to be waiting for me to throw my handkerchief amongst 'em," said Mr. Lobyer. "I like that painter-fellow's girl, because she laughs in my face, and treats me as if I was a government-clerk with a hundred and fifty pounds a-year. That's the sort of girl I call jolly."

The Sunday-evening visitors at the Fountains were not slow to perceive Florence Crawford's conquest. She was a coquette of the first water, and encouraged her loutish admirer by a persistent avoidance of him. If he hung over her piano, she rattled brilliantly through the shortest of *valses du salon*, or sang the briefest and crispest of her ballads, and had risen from the instrument and flitted away before Mr. Lobyer had made up his mind as to what he should say to her. If he worked his way to the sofa on which she was seated, or the open window by which she was standing, the lively Florence immediately became

absorbed in confidential discourse with a feminine visitor, and intensely unconscious of Mr. Lobyer.

If Florence Crawford—anxious to marry this man for the sake of his money—had acted on the most profound knowledge of his character, she could scarcely have played her cards better. A dogged obstinacy of purpose was the ruling attribute of Thomas Lobyer's mind; and the coquettish trifling of a schoolgirl aroused that bull-dog characteristic as it had seldom been aroused before.

Miss Crawford was eager to know what Cecil Chudleigh thought of her new conquest. She was childish enough to be proud of having made such a conquest. She was weak enough to be flattered by the admiration of a man whose sole title to respect was summed up in the figures in his banking-book.

"What do you think of him, Cecil?" she asked her friend.

"You mean Mr. Lobyer?"

"Yes, of course."

"I don't think he is particularly agreeable,

Flory. He seems to me to be rather stupid and awkward."

"O, but he's not stupid. I hear that he has a great deal of common-sense. He's rather good-looking, isn't he, Cecil?"

"I suppose he would be called so; but I don't admire his face. O Flory, you surely cannot be interested in my opinion of him?"

"Why shouldn't I be interested in your opinion of him?" Flo echoed, peevishly. "He is good-looking, and well-dressed, and — by no means stupid. He may be a little clumsy, perhaps; but I have seen heavy cavalry-officers quite as clumsy, and in them clumsiness is considered *distingué*. However, I won't talk to you about him any more, Cecil. You are as romantic as a girl in a novel."

Amongst the witnesses of Miss Crawford's triumph was one in whom the spectacle inspired despair. Philip Foley, the landscape-painter, privileged to join the miscellaneous crowd at the Fountains, looked on from the shadowy corner where he sat unnoticed and little known, and

ground his strong white teeth as he watched the tactics of the coquette and the hopeless entanglement of the cub. His old friend Sigismund was near him; but Sigismund Smythe the novelist was better known to fame than Philip Foley the unsuccessful landscape-painter; and some people were eager to be introduced to Mr. Smythe, and liked to talk to him for five minutes or so, after which they were apt to retire disappointed.

"It's no use disguising the fact," the young man said plaintively; "I do not meet their views, and they don't hesitate to let me know that I'm a failure. I ought to be dark and swarthy, like Dumas; or tall, and thin, and wiry, and hook-nosed, and satanic. What would I not give to Madame Rachel if she would make me diabolical for ever! What recompense should I think too much for my tailor if he could build me a coat that would make me look like Mephistopheles! I know a literary man who *is* like Mephistopheles, and a very handsome fellow he is too; but he writes essays on political economy, and his demoniac appearance is of no use to him."

In spite of Mr. Lobyer, poor Philip contrived to speak to Florence before he left the Fountains.

"So you are going to be married, Miss Crawford?" he said.

"Who told you any thing so absurd?" cried Flo, with a disdainful little laugh.

"Every body tells me so."

"Then every body is wrong," she answered, with an airy toss of her head; "and even if every body were not as utterly absurd and incorrect as a stupid gossiping every body generally is, I don't see what right you have to catechise me, Mr. Foley."

"No; I forgot my place. I forgot that I was only here on sufferance. What has an unsuccessful painter in common with the daughter of the most popular of modern artists? And yet I have heard your father talk of his probation. I have heard him speak of the day when he went to Trafalgar Square, in a fever of hope and expectation, to find the picture he believed in, glimmering through the darkness of the octagon room, an unmeaning daub of red, and blue, and yellow."

"It is very good of you to remind me that papa was once a pauper," answered Florence haughtily; and before Philip could say any thing more, she had turned away from him to shake hands with some of her departing guests.

After this the young man watched in vain for any opportunity of addressing Florence Crawford. He saw the rooms grow empty, and waited with the dogged determination of outstaying the cub; but the cub made no sign of departure, though the last of the other guests had vanished, and though Flo, who sat in a listless attitude beside a stand of engravings, had yawned audibly more than once. The prince of the cotton country stood by her side, stolid and unabashed, pretending to be interested in the engravings, which she turned with careless hands, and glaring at Mr. Foley in the intervals of his conversation.

Florence yawned for the third time, and more audibly than before. Mr. Crawford, who had been walking up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets, staring absently at the pictures, and stopping before one of them every now

and then to meditate, with bent head and moody brow, roused himself suddenly from his reverie, and looked from the little group by the open portfolio to the spot where Philip Foley stood leaning against a low marble chimneypiece, glum and dejected of aspect.

"Come, young men," said the painter; "my daughter seems tired, so you had better bid her good-night, and come and smoke a cigar in my painting-room."

Florence rose and made a curtsey, which included both her admirers; but she did not seem to perceive Mr. Lobyer's outstretched hand, nor did she deign to reward Philip for the *empressement* with which he flew to open the door for her as she passed out of the room. But when she was alone in her own room, sitting before her pretty dressing-table, and looking at herself dreamily in the glass as she removed the slender golden necklace and glittering locket from her neck, it was of Philip and not of Mr. Lobyer that she thought.

"What a nice fellow he would be if he were rich!" she said to herself. "How frank and

brave he is! I never like him so much as when he is uncivil to me. And if I were quite a different sort of girl, I can fancy that it would be very nice to marry him, and live in lodgings, and take an interest in his painting. But what would become of me if I were to marry such a man?—I, who haven't the faintest idea of a pudding, and never could sew a button on one of my muslin sleeves without spoiling half-a-dozen needles, and making myself like a murderer with blood. I never could marry a poor man after the things I've said. I can fancy how Lucy Chamberlayne, and those Verner girls, and Mary Masters, and all the girls who know me, would laugh. No, the day is past for that sort of thing: and as my heart is so free that I don't even know whether I've got a heart, and as Mr. Lobyer is by no means bad-looking, and as papa seems to like him—or, at any rate, doesn't seem to dislike him,—I suppose it is my fate to be mistress of Pevenshall."

CHAPTER XI.

AT NASEDALE.

Mr. Horatio Mountjoy, the Anglo-Indian judge for whom Mrs. MacClaverhouse had made her little dinner, had been one of the departed general's most intimate friends, and having now returned to England to pass the rest of his days in peaceful retirement, was anxious to show all possible kindness to the general's widow.

He had bought an estate in Surrey since his return,—a charming old mansion of the Queen-Anne period, with prim gardens of the Dutch school, a noble park, and a home-farm large enough to admit all the experiments of an amateur agriculturist, but not so extensive as to swamp the experimentalist's fortune. It was to this pleasant retreat that Mr. Mountjoy invited his old friend's widow and her niece.

"We are to have a very nice party," wrote the judge's wife; "and Horatio begs me to tell you that we shall expect *you* and dear Lady Cecil to stay till Christmas—even if our other friends grow tired of us, and run away before then. I thought your niece was looking pale and ill; but the breezes from the Surrey hills will set her up for next season."

"Now that's what I call hospitality!" exclaimed Mrs. MacClaverhouse; "but Mr. Mountjoy always was so magnificent in his way of doing things. 'That man has a regal mind,' I used to say to my husband, after one of the Mountjoy's Calcutta dinner-parties. And she's a good warm-hearted soul, though there's not much in her. There's nothing pays so well as a long visit, Cecil; and if the Mountjoys press us to stay till Christmas, I shall stay; for skipping about from one house to another eats into so much money in the way of travelling-expenses and servants' fees, that you might almost as well stop at home."

Cecil could only acquiesce in her aunt's arrangement. What was she but the handmaiden

of her kindly protectress, bound to go wherever the lively dowager chose to take her, and to be pleased and merry at the will of others? She was very tired of her life. Driving through pleasant suburbs in the phantom chariot, she looked with sad yearning eyes at tiny cottages, enshrined in tiny gardens, and thought how simple and placid existence might be in such modest habitations.

"What happiness to be one's own mistress!" she thought; "never to be obliged to smile when one is sad, or talk and laugh for the pleasure of other people. If my poor father had left me a hundred a-year, I might have lived in such a cottage, with my books and piano, and a few birds and flowers. I might have been good to the poor, even; for it is so easy for poor people to help one another. I envy the dowdiest old maid who ever eked out her tiny income. I envy any one and every one who can live their own lives."

But after indulging in such thoughts as these Cecil felt ashamed of the ingratitude involved in her mute repinings. Was not her kinswoman

good and affectionate after her own sharp fashion? and was it not the dependent's duty to be pleased and satisfied with the home that sheltered her? Even if there was some sacrifice of freedom demanded from her, Cecil could have made that sacrifice without complaining, if the dowager would only have let her alone. But to refrain from interference with the business of other people was just one of those things which Mrs. MacClaverhouse could not do. She had set her heart upon her niece making a good marriage, and to that end she kept watch upon every eligible bachelor who came within her ken.

It was in vain that Cecil protested against any thing like matrimonial scheming in her behalf. The dowager did not hesitate to remind her of the dull dead level of poverty that lay before her in the future.

"Do you happen to remember that my pension dies with me, Lady Cecil," she demanded angrily, "and that I have only a wretched pittance and a collection of obsolete Indian trumpery to leave you? So long as I live you will be able

to keep afloat somehow in society; but I should like to know what will become of you when I am gone? You turn up your nose at my managing ways; but it is only by management that I have contrived to keep my head above water, and have my own carriage to ride in, and my own maid to travel with me. As for you, you are no more of a manager than one of those Indian idols; and a landlady who wouldn't dare to take half a glass of wine out of the cellaret or a spoonful of tea out of the caddy while I am alive, would pilfer you out of house and home before I'd been in my grave a month. It's all very well to talk about not wishing to marry, and being happy alone with your books and piano, and so forth; but you're not the stuff old maids are made of, Lady Cecil. The girls of the present day are not brought up to make old maids. They are like the houses that the cheap builders run up, that are made to sell, and not to last. The girls of the present day are delightful creatures, but they are brought up to marry rich men and live in fine houses, and be imposed upon by their servants. I pity the children of the rising

generation, for they will have no maiden aunts to spoil them."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had been shrewd enough to perceive the impression made on Mr. O'Boyneville by her niece's attractions. She knew that the barrister was rich—and, indeed, had sounded Mr. Crawford as to his probable income, which was of course exaggerated by the painter, who accepted the popular report of the lawyer's gains without that grain of salt with which all such reports should be taken. On questioning Cecil very closely respecting Mr. O'Boyneville's call, the dowager had speedily perceived that something special had distinguished it from common visits.

"He asked my permission to call," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse; "and he said quite enough to convince me that he had fallen over head and ears in love with you. It's my opinion he came to make you an offer of marriage; and that's why I kept out of the way. But, bless my heart and soul! I needn't have taken the trouble—for of course you refused him; though I am told his in-

come is little short of four thousand a-year. You are bent upon dying a homeless pauper, and all I hope is that they'll have improved the casual wards of the unions before your time."

Cecil tried to parry her aunt's attack, but the elder lady was past mistress of the polite art of conversational fencing, and she did not abandon the assault until her niece had unwillingly confessed the secret of Mr. O'Boyneville's visit.

"And you refused him!" shrieked the indignant dowager. "That's what I call flying in the face of Providence. This is the second chance you've had within two years, Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and I hope I may live to wish you joy of the third; but I freely confess I don't expect to do so."

This sort of expostulation is by no means pleasant to hear, and poor Cecil had to listen patiently to much harping on the same string. She was familiar with every variation which such a theme can undergo in the hands of a skilful composer,—the minor wailings and lamentations, the brilliant crescendos of feminine mockery, the bass grumblings and sharp forte passages of anger, the

peevish rallentandos and diminuendos. The unhappy girl bore it all, but she suffered acutely.

The change to Nasedale did not set her free from her aunt's lectures; for considerate Mrs. Mountjoy allotted two charming bedrooms, with a pretty sitting-room between them, to the two ladies; and here, on rainy days, Cecil enjoyed a great deal of her aunt's society.

"I don't want to detain you here if you'd rather be in the billiard-room, or making yourself sticky with *décalcomanie* amongst those frivolous girls in the drawing-room. What regiments of girls there are in the world! and what in goodness' name is to become of them all, I wonder!" exclaimed the dowager, parenthetically. "As to the men the Mountjoys have collected, I never saw so many married fogies gathered together in one house; and the way they stuff themselves at luncheon is something dreadful. Tiffin, indeed! I'd tiffin them if they were my visitors. A glass of dry sherry at thirty-five shillings a dozen and a picnic biscuit is all they'd get between breakfast and dinner from me."

But Nasedale was a very pleasant place, in spite of the elderly fogies who over-ate themselves at luncheon, and the frivolous young ladies who devoted themselves to the decoration of cups and saucers that wouldn't bear washing, and dessert-plates the painted splendours of which rarely survived the ordeal of preserved ginger or guava jelly.

Hospitality reigned supreme in the comfortable mansion. People did as they liked. The scenery for twenty miles round was superb; and if Mr. Mountjoy was not quite so magnificent as the nabob who ordered "more curricles," the Nasedale stables supplied plenty of horses, and the Nasedale coach-houses contained every variety of modern vehicle for the accommodation of the visitors,—from the omnibus which took the servants to church or the ladies to a county ball, to the miniature Croydon basket-chaise and the deliciously stumpy little pony, which the most timid of the décalcomaniacs was scarcely afraid to drive.

After returning from a hurried run up to town, the judge astonished the dowager, and con-

siderably disconcerted Cecil, by exclaiming in the middle of dinner:

"O, by the bye, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, I met your friend O'Boyneville in Lincoln's Inn to-day, and I asked him if he could run down for a day or two. He seems to be full of business; but when he heard you were down here, he evidently felt inclined to come. Not very flattering to me, you'll say. I told him of our archery-meeting on the twentieth, and he said, 'If it's possible, I'll be down in time for the archery-meeting; but it's about as nearly impossible as any thing human can be.'"

Lady Cecil breathed more freely. She dreaded the appearance of her rejected suitor, and the friendly persecution to which his coming would inevitably expose her. But when the two ladies retired to their room that night, the dowager cried triumphantly:

"If Mr. O'Boyneville is as much in earnest as I think he is, he'll come to the archery-meeting, Cecil; and I do hope, if he renews his offer, you'll be wise enough to accept it."

The archery-meeting of which the judge had spoken was to be a very grand affair, and the young ladies at Nasedale had made their fingers sore and their shoulders weary with the twanging of bows. The meeting was to take place on a noble plateau, at the top of the noblest range of hills in all Surrey; and all the fun of a picnic was to be combined with the excitement of a toxophilite contest.

"We might have had our archery-meeting in the park," said the judge, when he explained to his guests the arrangements he had made for their pleasure; "but to my mind half the fun of these things is in the going and returning. The officers of the 14th are to drive over from Burtonslowe to meet us; and I've invited all sorts of people from town. I won't say any thing about the two prizes I selected at Hunt and Roskell's this morning; but I hope my taste will please the ladies who win them."

Cecil did not affect the twanging of bows, and was content to remain amongst the young ladies who, after vainly endeavouring to hit the bull's-

eye, and losing their arrows in distant brushwood, without having so much as grazed the outermost edge of the target, retired from the contest, and declared that there was nothing so very exciting in archery after all, and that croquet was twenty times better. Amongst these milder spirits Cecil beguiled the fine summer afternoons with that gentle tapping of wooden-balls, and liberal display of high-heeled boots, which is the favourite dissipation of modern damsels; and thus, amid quiet pleasures, with a good deal of riding and driving, and novel-reading and billiard-playing, and much good eating and drinking, time glided by at Nasedale until the nineteenth, and as yet there were no signs of the Queen's Counsel.

"If O'Boyneville had meant to be amongst us to-morrow he'd have made his appearance by this time," said the judge in the course of dinner. "He knows we start early to-morrow morning."

"I can't fancy O'Boyneville at a picnic," said a listless young gentleman who was amongst the new arrivals. "I can't fancy him any where except in the law-courts. One sometimes meets

him at men's dinners, but he never seems to enjoy himself unless he can talk *shop*, and he looks at the other fellows as if he'd like to cross-examine them."

The usual meanderings on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows, with which the younger members of the Nasedale party were wont to beguile the warm summer evenings, were impossible to-night, for at nine o'clock a violent clap of thunder shook the roofs and chimneys of the old mansion, and pretty little feminine shriekings and screechings fluttered the tranquillity of the party. The young ladies who were not afraid of the lightning made a merit of not being afraid; and the young ladies who were afraid made a merit of being horribly frightened, and shivered and started in the most bewitching manner at sight of every flash. And one young lady who had written a volume of poetry, in which a weak solution of L. E. L. was artfully intermingled with a still weaker solution of Mrs. Browning, stood before a window and exclaimed about the grandeur and sublimity of the spectacle.

Cecil, sitting quietly at work under a reading-lamp, was rather rejoiced when she heard the violent downpour of rain which succeeded the storm.

"Mr. O'Boyneville will scarcely come to-night, at any rate," she thought.

There was a great deal of lamentation about the rain, and considerable discussion as to whether it augured ill or well for the morrow. It was a blessing to get the storm over. But then the grass would be damp, most likely, and so on. The young ladies thought of their delicate boots, their dainty dresses.

"My hat cost two guineas and a half," murmured one damsel to a sympathising confidante. "A ruche of peacock's feathers, you know, dear; and the sweetest mother-of-pearl butterfly, and a tiny, tiny green-chenille bird's-nest, with three gold eggs in it, at the side—and one shower of rain would utterly spoil it."

The rain came thicker and faster. Nothing short of a hurricane would serve to dry the grass after such a storm. But Cecil did not think of

the picnic; she only congratulated herself upon the improbability that Mr. O'Boyneville would care to travel in such weather.

"No chance of O'Boyneville," said Mr. Mountjoy, as he stood before the fire which he had ordered to be lighted since the advent of the rain. "I told him to write and announce his coming, so that I might send a vehicle over to the station to meet him. It's a ten-mile drive, you know, and there's very seldom so much as a fly to be had at that miserable little station. However, the last London post is in, and there's no letter from O'Boyneville."

The pattering of the rain against the windows made itself heard in every pause of the conversation, and the noise of the pelting drops grew louder every moment. Cecil was still bending quietly over her work in a cosy corner near the angle of the wide velvet-covered mantelpiece, and the judge's guests had gathered in a circle about the cheery fire, when the bell of the great hall-door rang loudly.

"Who the deuce can that be, at this time of

night, and at this time of such a night?" cried Mr. Mountjoy.

"Whoever he is, he is the owner of a tolerably strong arm, and he knows how to make his arrival public," said one of the listless visitors.

The drawing-room opened out of the hall; and in the silence that followed the clamour of the bell, Mr. Mountjoy and his visitors heard the opening of the ponderous door, the rapid accents of a sonorous bass voice asking questions, and a fluttering sound which resembled the noise made by an enormous Newfoundland-dog who shakes himself dry after emerging from the water.

There was a pause of some ten minutes, and then the drawing-room door was thrown open, and a servant announced:

"Mr. O'Boyneville."

"I thought as much," said the dowager in an undertone, which was intended only for the ear of her niece.

The barrister made his appearance, a little damp and weather-stained, in spite of the hurried toilet he had made since entering the house, but

with the freshness of the open air upon him, and the aspect of a man whose heart is aglow with triumph. He received the cordial welcome of his host, shook hands with the people he knew, offered a big cold paw to Cecil as coolly as if there had been nothing out of the common in their last parting, showed his white teeth, laughed at nothing particular till every crystal drop in the old-fashioned chandelier shivered and trembled, and, in short, made more noise in five minutes than the rest of the party had made in the whole of the evening.

"Yes, it certainly isn't the nicest weather for travelling," he said, in reply to his host's eager inquiries; "but you see I said I'd come if it was possible; and here I am. I was on a committee in Victoria Street at half-past five; took a hansom, and told the man to drive to Brunswick Square like wild-fire; packed my portmanteau and put on my dress-coat while the man waited; drove to the Oriental Club, and left my portmanteau with the porter while I dined with the Governor-general of Seringapatam; rose from the

table at a quarter before nine, borrowed a railway rug from one of the waiters, and caught the nine-o'clock train at Waterloo; found myself an hour after at a little station where there was one deaf porter, and no vehicle of any description whatever; had considerable difficulty in getting any thing at all out of the deaf porter; but finally extracted the pleasing intelligence that Nasedale was a good ten mile, and that, barring John Cole's own bay mare at the Pig and Whistle, there wasn't an animal of any kind to be had within a mile and a half. Of course, after hearing this, the best thing was to get John Cole's bay mare; and fine work I had with John Cole before he would let me have the beast, which he keeps for his own pleasure and convenience, and which has never been ridden or driven by man or boy except himself since he bought her at Barnet fair, six years come next October. However, when he saw that I meant to have the animal whether he liked it or not, and when he heard where I was coming, he made a virtue of necessity, and brought her out—and here I am: and I think,

my dear Mountjoy, of all the lanes I ever had the pleasure of beholding, the lanes between this place and the station are the muddiest; and of all the rain that ever reduced the civilised universe to pulp and slop, the rain I came through to-night has been the heaviest."

After this Mr. O'Boyneville took possession of the company, as it was his wont to take possession of any assemblage in which he happened to find himself. He went into society very rarely, and the laws of society had very little restraint for him. He could talk well, and he knew that he could talk well. The necessities of his professional career had obliged him to possess himself of a superficial knowledge of every subject, and some smattering of almost every science. A native audacity did the rest; and a frank *bonhomie* of manner, a slapdash mode of expression, which was too original to be vulgar, won the suffrages of people who would have tabooed a smaller man for lesser sins against conventionality than those which were permitted in Mr. O'Boyneville.

He talked well, and, like most good talkers,

he very often talked nonsense; for the man who weighs his sentences before he utters them, who pauses to consider the force of an argument before he launches it, is rarely a brilliant conversationalist. And sometimes it seems as if the brightest creatures of the brain are those ephemeral and unconsidered trifles which a man utters haphazard in the heat of argument or the abandonment of purposeless small-talk. Posterity values Samuel Johnson rather for the happy sayings of a convivial evening than for the ponderous polysyllables of his most carefully considered compositions.

A silver salver, bearing a monster tankard of mulled claret, was brought into the drawing-room before the assembly dispersed; and in the diversion afforded by the handing about of the wine, Mr. O'Boyneville contrived to seat himself between Cecil and her aunt; and after artfully conciliating the elder lady, he drew his chair nearer to the little table by which the younger sat absorbed in her work.

"You don't know what difficulty I had to get

here to-night, Lady Cecil," he said; "and it was only because you are here that I came."

"Then I am very sorry you should have come," answered Cecil gravely.

"Are you still so hard-hearted?"

"Mr. O'Boyneville! Is it a gentlemanly act to follow me here, where I have no power to avoid you, and to talk to me in this manner? If you come here for your own pleasure, to make one of an agreeable party, I am as happy to see you as any one else in this house can be. But if you come here to persecute me by attentions which are as ungentlemanly as they are foolish, I shall beg my aunt to take me away from this house to-morrow morning."

The barrister looked at her pale proud face with an expression of profound sorrow.

"That will do, Lady Cecil," he said; "that is quite enough. I thought what you said the other day might mean only a lady's negative. I thought I was too abrupt—that I surprised and offended you by my way of plunging into the subject, and so on. But I see now that I was

mistaken. Good-night, Lady Cecil; I shall never offend you again."

He held out his hand, but he scarcely clasped her slender fingers as they rested for one brief moment in his expansive palm. The sadness in his voice, the sorrowful expression of his face had touched her, and she felt the natural womanly desire to heal the wounds she herself had inflicted. But before she could think of any thing to say which should in some degree console the Irishman's wounded feelings, yet in no manner embolden him to renew his attack, Mr. O'Boyneville had left her, and was bidding his host good-night.

Lady Cecil had to endure a lecture from her aunt before she shut herself in her own room that night; and when she went to bed it was to think compassionately of the Irish barrister's sorrow.

And while she pitied him, Mr. O'Boyneville settled himself complacently to his placid slumber, and mused upon the evening's adventures as he fell asleep.

"You're very haughty and you're very reso-

lute; but you'll marry me sooner or later, for all that, my bright Cecil, my beautiful Cecil. It isn't possible for a man to be as much in earnest as I am, and yet wind up by making a failure."

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